Adult learners' experiences from learning age to Leitch: Implications of policy for local implementation and impact on learners

Thesis

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ADULT LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES

FROM LEARNING AGE TO LEITCH : IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY FOR LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT ON LEARNERS

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Abstract

Centralised policy development seems 'dislocated' from policy implementation at a local level. The intent of nationally developed policy does not take sufficient account of local implementation needs and this, in turn, affects how a particular policy impacts on an individual or community. Since policy development is framed alongside a prevailing political environment (Hill, 2003), it is designed with broad national priorities in mind, often with identified target groups as its recipients. It is developed in a 'top down' way, based on what those with influence and power determine is the best way forward, to achieve the policy outcomes. The tendency is to regard all those within a particular target group as having similar needs, whereas in reality each individual has a unique set of circumstances relating to their life experience (Barton et al, 2006) as well as their physical situation, which can influence the impact a particular policy can have. The further away the detail of policy development is from its implementation sites, the less likely it is to be flexible enough to address a broad range of individual needs at a local level.

In order to understand the relevance of local implementation for individuals' experience, with respect to the impact of Adult Skills policy, the study focuses on one particular aspect of Adult Skills policy i.e. Skills for Life. This was a priority area for New Labour policy development in the earliest days of their government. The Skills for Life strategy, arising out of the recommendations of the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) was conceived nationally through the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit but was implemented by local Learning and Skills Councils who developed individual Skills for Life strategies (L&R LSC, 2000) to meet the needs of their own areas. Over the past several years, as part of the process of implementing the government's Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001), there have been major changes in the way that literacy, numeracy and language provision is delivered.

The overall research question for the study is to establish if what individuals' tell us about their experiences of learning has implications for the way in which current Skills for Life policy is implemented at a local level and to what extent does increasing centralisation of policy development limit the ability of local implementation structures to meet the needs of individuals?

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Chapter 1: introduction

This research focuses on the experiences of individuals taking part in a range of adult literacy classes at various locations and with various providers across rural Lincolnshire. The study aims to explore the potential differences between policy intention and its consequences (Hill, 2003) linked to implementation of policy at a local level and the impact that it has on individuals. It does this, firstly, through examining participants' descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning to identify potential personal factors (McGivney, 2001) which may influence their future attitudes to formal learning. Secondly, it examines their current formal learning experiences and what are the potential implications for the implementation of national skills policy at a local level and its' impact on learners. For clarity, I have used the term 'formal learning' in the text to refer to classes or courses which have been or are currently being undertaken by individuals in the study and which were the subject of the descriptions in the interviews. While education is potentially a more accurate term to describe planned educational activities (Merriam and Brockett, 1997), the background for the study is the Government's Adult Skills policy, specifically the Skills for Life policy (DfES, 2001) and learning is the term most used in this context. The terms 'learning' and 'skills' are used in a broad political consensus interchangeably in that while adult learning is considered important and welcome, in a policy context, skills matter (O'Leary and Oakley, 2008)

This introduction mirrors the structure of the thesis and covers briefly the topics covered in subsequent chapters. Firstly, it sets out the background to the study in terms of my personal and professional interest in the topic. Section two poses the broader questions underpinning the research, relating these to the development of the specific research questions and the overall approach to the study. Thirdly, it considers the identification of other studies on similar

themes, highlighting the issues and gaps which needed to be addressed and how these related to the approach I decided to take. Section four outlines the geographical and demographic context within which the study was carried out. The next section covers the types of provision available and gives some details about the specific classes that were chosen. Finally, there is a summary of the chapter which considers the main points raised and links these to the work of the literature review in chapter two.

The research topic grew out of my personal interest in understanding how an individual's experiences might influence their subsequent choices about learning, particularly about formal learning. The specific focus of the study developed as a result of my professional responsibilities for the *local* implementation of national policy relating to adult skills. Personally, I have been involved over many years working with adults in the UK and in South Africa who would be considered educationally 'hard to reach' (McGivney, 1991). I am interested in trying to understand why some individuals participate in formal learning in spite of the fact that they have had difficult previous experiences. There are many potential influences on an individual's decision to participate, some relating to what McGivney (2001) refers to as situational barriers such as poor transport to venues; lack of childcare and timing of courses and many of these have been extensively researched. This has resulted in a range of responsive processes being put in place to overcome some of these barriers and encourage 'hard to reach' adults to participate. For many adults, this has resulted in greater access and has made it possible for them to participate in formal learning activity to a much greater extent.

> '...839,000 adults have achieved literacy, numeracy and language qualifications since 2001; 670,000 more adults a year are participating in further education than in 1997; 130,000 employers have benefited from Employer Training Pilots (now Train to Gain) since 2002',
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> Extract from 'Skills – Getting on in business, getting on at work' (DfES/DTI/DWP, 2005)

There are also individuals who do not take part in formal learning as adults. Engaging these individuals in formal learning is increasingly the focus of the Government's Adult Skills policy, with considerable emphasis being placed on encouraging these individuals into formal learning (DfES, 2005). While the situational factors identified by McGivney (2001) are one aspect of an individual's decision making about formal learning, another aspect are personal factors which are identified by McGivney (2001) as being significant in an individual's choices about formal learning. The study attempts to identify the impact of past and present experiences on how an individual might view formal learning and what influence this might have on their decision making about taking up further learning opportunities. While research is available on the identification of a range of barriers to learning for adults, I was not able to identify many examples of research which took individual experience as a central theme. This was particularly true in the early days of the research, however increasingly, there is more research being published on this and much more discussion about this as a significant issue in the work of re-engaging adults in formal learning activity (Barton et al, 2006) and I have incorporated some of this work into the literature review.

Professionally, as part of my role at the local LSC[1], I have responsibility for the development and implementation of local implementation of Adult Skills policy in Lincolnshire. Currently, there are a broad range of national policy initiatives which impact on the local delivery of skills provision to adults, from a focus on access to a free first level 2 qualification (LSC, 2005) to the availability of the Adult Learner Account as a local pilot (LSC, 2007). It is important to

the effective *local* implementation of these policies that development and planning should be done taking into account local context and as far as possible, local priorities. This has become increasingly more challenging over the last five years as the Government's learning and

[1] Where the term 'local LSC' is used in the text, this refers to the Lincolnshire and Rutland Learning and Skills Council.

skills agenda has become more particular in its' emphasis on skills and the need for all publicly funded formal learning activity to be relevant to work (Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006). While there have been some initial successes in increasing engagement and take up of formal learning, there are still large numbers of adults who remain disengaged. Lincolnshire has particular problems with regard to levels of qualifications within its' population, with significant numbers of adults having no or low qualifications (Owen, 2005). Locally, as nationally, there is considerable emphasis being placed on skills development as the focus of local strategies for formal learning and the need to increase the skill levels of adults in the county (LCC, 2007). It is interesting to consider the extent to which this lack of engagement has been characterised as deficient and problematic by the current Government rhetoric about skills and economic empowerment (DfES, 2005) as opposed to it being a legitimate choice which individuals can make (Field, 2006; Field and Malcolm,2006; Brine, 2006). From a policy implementation perspective, there is an increasing need to look 'deeper' into disengaged communities and identify what other influences there might be on an individual's decision whether or not to engage in formal learning and, at the same time to try to establish if local implementation of adult skills policy is meeting the needs of those who do engage. I believed that a greater awareness of individuals' experiences of formal learning might help in understanding why there are those within the same communities who choose to engage and those who do not. This research is aimed at those who have chosen to undertake further formal learning as adults, in order to try to understand why they have chosen to do so.

The broader question for the research was to establish if what individuals have to tell us about their past and present experiences of formal learning has implications for the way in which we implement policy at a local level and what impact this might have on individuals. For the purposes of this study, the decision was to focus on individuals who were currently taking part in a formal learning so that they were able to describe their previous and current experiences.

There were two practical reasons for choosing individuals who were taking part in courses at the time the study was undertaken. Firstly, this was a group of individuals who I was able to identify in sufficient numbers so that I had a range of participants to work with. Focussing on individuals who were enrolled on LSC funded Literacy courses meant that I was able to approach several providers and gain their support to approach a number of learners. The issue in identifying those who are not participating would have been much more complex since establishing who these individuals were would have proved difficult since they were not participating in the first place (Barton et al, 2006). Secondly, however, a significant part of the research was to look at the impact of current local implementation on individuals current experiences of formal learning so for this study current participation was an essential criteria. In order to develop the study from this broader question, there were two areas of focus for the research: firstly, do an individual's descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning indicate that there are 'personal' factors which may influence their further choices about engaging in formal learning? Secondly, how do individuals' describe their current experiences of formal learning and what are the implications of this for the implementation of national skills policy at a local level? These two issues formed the basis of the research questions identified in chapter two.

Given the broad range of adult skills policies being implemented within the local LSC area, I decided to use one particular policy rather than look at the whole spectrum. In deciding which policy to identify for the study, I chose the Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001) which was a policy that had a reasonably high profile within the remit of the local LSC and which had broad policy guidance that had been interpreted for local implementation. The funding allocated to support the policy implementation through local network capacity building was significant and it had been possible to fund a range of different providers to run the courses, It was also a policy which I had responsibility for locally which I felt would mean that I would have more influence in ensuring that any recommendations of the

research would be able to be implemented locally. In the early stages of planning the research, I had intended to use a range of Skills for Life courses including literacy, numeracy and ESOL but as the research plan progressed, I became aware that the initial scope of the study was too extensive to have a reasonable chance of completion so I decided to concentrate on literacy courses only, which meant that I was able to allocate more time to the interviews.

The Skills for Life policy (DfES, 2001) committed the Government and its' agencies to work together to improve the Literacy and Numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004[2]. The Skills for Life strategy (incorporating literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision) was an important policy for the current government, developed in response to the recommendations of the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999). The national target was adopted by the Learning and Skills Council nationally with local LSCs being allocated proportions of this target. In the early stages of implementation, local LSCs were given access to extra funding to develop their Skills for Life delivery infrastructure and to build the capacity of the workforce. Local LSCs had considerable autonomy in how they developed and implemented their local Skills for Life policy (L&R LSC, 2001) and were able to take into account the needs of local areas. As previously explained, I chose to focus on Literacy classes being delivered by a range of providers and the study was carried out at sites which covered three main types of literacy provision in Lincolnshire i.e. Further education colleges; Adult and Community Learning[3] provided through the County Council, and provision delivered in a community-based Neighbourhood Learning Centre using funding from the European Social Fund. All three types of provision were funded by the local LSC and the delivery of the provision was at venues which were spread out across Lincolnshire. Each venue operated within the structural and organisational constraints (McGivney, 1991) of access

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[2] this target is currently set at 2.25 million adults by 2010 (DIUS, 2007).
[3] Adult and Community Learning is now referred to as Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) as part of the restructuring of adult learning policy. PDCL provision is subject to a ringfenced or safeguarded allocation of funding which is intended as a means of protecting this type of provision. (LSC – planning guidance, 2006)

and transport common to most rural areas. While acknowledging that the rural dimension of an individuals' experience of formal learning may have some potentially significant impacts on individuals as a result of what Atkin (2000) describes as ' rural habitus', I took the decision not to include this element in the research because it would have added a further dimension to the already large scope of the study. Also, I felt that while these barriers were of significance to the learners involved, and might impact on their take up of learning, individuals who took part in this study were considered to have overcome these barriers for the most part since they were attending and taking part in the classes. The research, while acknowledging the potential barriers created by the rural nature of the provision, was focused on those influences which McGivney (1991) calls 'personal, cultural and social' and which are grouped together in a study by Kambouri and Francis (1994) as 'personal/domestic reasons'.

In the early days of the research planning, I was only able to identify one study which, I felt, was specifically relevant to the topic. This particular study, covering similar issues to the ones that I intended to look at in my research, was a study sponsored by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. The study was published in 1994 and covered research carried out between 1991 and 1993. The aim of the study was 'to examine the incidence and nature of drop-out and progression from basic skills provision in England and Wales' (Kambouri and Francis, 1994). Research data was collected using questionnaires and surveys sent to tutors in 8 local education authority areas in England. The data was mainly focused on information collected from questionnaires sent to tutors which they were asked to complete retrospectively for phase 1 of the study and on an ongoing basis for phase 2. They recorded information about enrolments, retention, early leavers and progression for students on basic skills courses. Tutors were also asked to record the reason for leaving if the student left the course early. The data was collated, analysed and conclusions were drawn about patterns of drop-out and progression. While a considerable amount of data relating to patterns

of enrolment and early leaving were processed, the study did not consider in any detail the reasons given by students for leaving the course early. For example, by far the most frequently given reason for leaving courses early was a category described as 'personal /domestic reasons'. The subsequent analysis concluded that,

> '..... some of these factors, e.g. low motivation, low self-esteem, can be expected to improve under the right guidance. Others are too complicated to be tackled in a classroom' (Kambouri and Francis, 1994).

There was no attempt in this study to engage with the students to try to determine what the specific issues were that had been grouped together under 'personal/domestic reasons'. I was keen to develop a fuller understanding of what these reasons were because this would be of value in informing the way in which local policy could be developed in the future. I was equally convinced that I wanted to try to understand these 'personal/domestic reasons' by listening to individual descriptions of their experiences rather than through second hand accounts based on a tutor's conclusions about those in their class. This, then, was the focus of my research.

In developing the study, I first considered the overall context within which the research would be taking place. Increasingly, the economies of England's rural counties are falling behind those of the more urban areas. There are many factors contributing to this decline such as poor infrastructure, sparse population and a changing economic focus from traditional agriculture based employment. Lincolnshire's low productivity and poor economic growth are considered in a report commissioned by Lincolnshire Enterprise to be one of the major factors inhibiting the economic performance of the East Midlands (Owen, 2005). Lincolnshire Enterprise is the sub-regional strategic partnership of the East Midlands Development Agency. A significant part of the reason for this economic decline is identified in the report as the seasonal, low skilled and low wage micro-economies of large parts of the county. Qualification levels

across areas of Lincolnshire are low in comparison with national and regional levels.

One of the objectives identified in the 'Hidden Crisis' report is for Lincolnshire to be able to match the UK skills levels by 2016. Much of the funding available for this is currently directed through the local LSC, for example, through the Adult level 2 entitlement which provides full funding for adults to obtain a first full level 2 qualification. The report makes the point that,

> 'The main difficulty with raising skills levels in rural Lincolnshire is not, however, the delivery of learning: it is securing take-up in the first place. Raising take-up will require a concerted programme of action to contact, advise and motivate people to take the first steps in learning, and then to support them as they proceed.' (Owen, 2005)

Rurality was a common thread running through the experiences of all the learners that I interviewed. However, as explained previously, the research does not attempt to explore the issue of rurality specifically but notes it here as a common factor in the context of individuals accessing learning provision in Lincolnshire. Those potential barriers of access and range of choice which are associated with rurality were common to all of the learners that were involved in the study, so while the associated structural influences such as availability and cost of transport were noted (McGivney,1991 and 2001), the emphasis of the research was to consider personal influences described through learners' experiences. In reviewing the policy documents relating to Skills for Life, there is little that specifically refers to the rural context. The adult literacy learner is described in terms of a deprived urban situation and what references there are to rurality relate to 'those working in low skilled or short term employment' and those living in 'disadvantaged communities' (DfEE, 1999). However, it is worth noting that a recent research project on the impact of adult literacy and numeracy levels on small businesses in Lincolnshire and Rutland concludes that, 'though Skills

for Life has a particular spatiality, it tends to operate with a vague non-geography; rurality is ignored' (Atkin and Merchant, 2004). Nationally, there is little specific rural focus in the application of the Skills for Life strategy and yet locally it is of considerable significance. Research carried out on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council looked at factors affecting education and training in sparsely populated areas and concluded that it was vital that further research be carried out to determine how demand for learning in sparsely populated areas can be increased and the needs of those in these areas who currently choose not to learn can be identified (LSC, 2003).

In this next section, the classes are described in more detail in terms of the formal learning activity that they were part of, drawing out the similarities and differences between the groups of learners. It is important to understand something of the background surrounding these groups and the individual learners who took part in the study (Appendix 5). Firstly, that the research was conducted across a variety of delivery sites which allowed for access to a range of 'makes and models' of formal learning. Secondly, that individual participants were, for the most part, members of larger groups of learners within each class. With the exception of two individuals who were taking part in one to one sessions at their employer's premises, all of the learners interviewed were selected from the class lists of each group given to me by the class tutors. Tutors had previously explained to the classes about the research, individuals were given the chance to ask questions and were able to opt out of being included on the list if they so wished. It is worth noting however that none chose to do so and all were very keen to participate.

Below is an outline of the types of provision and the delivery sites that were chosen (Appendix 1):

Further Education colleges

One of the LSC's main funding allocations for Skills for Life courses is to Further Education colleges. By far the greatest volume of

literacy provision in Lincolnshire is delivered through the FE Colleges. There are four FE Colleges based in Lincolnshire and for the project, I worked with two of them. I identified three different locations and approaches to delivery from the range of classes that they offered. It is a feature of the work of both colleges in respect of Skills for Life provision that they are pro-active in offering provision which is as flexible as possible in meeting the needs of learners particularly with regard to structural issues associated with rurality, such as accessibility of venues and timing of courses. I conducted interviews with individuals attending three different literacy courses run by the colleges, each class having a different focus, venue and participant base. I have described each class using the actual course name rather than using the generic term 'literacy' as I feel that this demonstrates something of the diversity of approach taken.

An 'English' class taking place at a Women's Shelter

This class was run by an FE College on behalf of a voluntary organisation which supported young mothers from the surrounding area who attended the venue during the week. Funding for the course came from the College, but childcare was provided by the Shelter in their onsite crèche facility. The mission of the Shelter was to provide support for young mothers across the area, taking young women from as young as 14 through to 25. After 25, the women were not able to continue to get support from the Shelter as a result of the conditions of their charitable funding. The individuals I interviewed were taking part in a class that met once a week, although most of the young women attended the centre everyday. The class was a fairly loose grouping of about 8 individuals. The numbers attending varied week by week. I interviewed three women from the course, the first interview was at week two of the start of the new term of the course and the second interview took place at week 6 of the course. Each of the young women had unique backgrounds (Appendix 5) but there were considerable commonalities in the way in which they described their decisions to come to the Shelter. Interestingly these circumstantial similarities were mirrored as they recounted their

experiences during the interviews. The time I spent at the Shelter was insufficient to do anything more than scratch the surface of the experiences that these young women had had, and I am keen to go back and carry out more research over a longer period of time to try to understand more about the experiences that have been the stepping stones bringing these individuals to the place they find themselves in. Engaging and fiercely different personalities but sharing so much experience in common, it was a privilege to have the opportunity to spend time with these young women.

College based English class

This class was the most 'traditional' of all the classes I worked with. The class took place at the College site in the evenings twice a week. It comprised 16 individuals and was run by a tutor and two learner support colleagues. Attendance at the group varied week by week.

The group was mixed in terms of gender, age and employment status. Individual reasons for attending varied considerably across the group, ranging from wanting to get on at work through to helping children with homework. The three individuals I interviewed were selected from the attendance list and covered the range of age, gender and employment status of the group. These individuals had a much broader spectrum of 'journeys' and had very few common factors except for their expressed desire to improve their literacy skills. There was no other incentive for them to attend the class, but once again the commonality of their experiences of previous learning was interesting.

One to one 'English' lessons at an employer's premises

These sessions were the most 'bespoke' examples that I came across and had been begun as a result of an approach by the HR department of the employer to the local College on behalf of two of its employees. The two individuals concerned, both male, had been employed by the company for some time in a range of artisan type work and had been able to 'hide' their literacy issues over a period of

years. Both individuals used the term 'hide' in their descriptions of how they had managed to cope with their limited literacy in the past. However, both had begun to find that in recent years the paperwork side of the job had become increasingly significant and particularly as a result of the greater emphasis on health and safety and the need to go on courses related to this, it was becoming more and more difficult to cope with being unable to read and write effectively.

One of the individuals was being encouraged by his employer to become a foreman and the tuition was part of a development programme developed for him. An approach through their employer had resulted in the contact with the College, which agreed to run one to one sessions at the employer's premises, for each of the two men. The one to one approach had been adopted as a result of consultations with the two individuals about what they wanted, and the College and their employer had been extremely supportive of this. Both individuals had had difficult experiences at school, one had subsequently been identified as being severely dyslexic by the college. Both men said that they had been supported by their partners who had gone to considerable lengths to help them 'hide' their problems with reading and writing.

Adult and Community Learning

Another funding route for delivery of literacy provision is through a provider of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) in Lincolnshire, particularly activity delivered through Family Learning. A range of courses of this type are run throughout Lincolnshire in co-operation with local schools and are usually delivered on school sites. The focus of Family Learning is to bring parents and children together to share learning experiences and this approach continues to be an extremely successful way of re-engaging parents in formal learning activity particularly amongst communities who are 'harder to reach'. One recurring issue, however, has been that once parents have completed the Family Learning course, there is often little provision available for them to continue formal learning should they so wish.

Reading and writing course at a local pub

This particular course was an offshoot of Family Learning provision initiated as a result of parents in a Family Learning class wanting to continue with their literacy course once the family learning sessions had finished. The class was attended by 11 women, aged between 27 and 51, all unemployed, who had previously attended a Family Learning course at the local school on their estate and who had wanted to continue with the class once the other had finished. The venue was extremely informal and quite challenging for the tutor who had to be very creative in terms of delivery and range of activity. I interviewed three individuals from the course. The class had been running for quite some time but the majority of the women attended regularly, and they had also developed a social grouping outside of the class. There were a wide range of ages in the group, all had children but the children's ages also varied considerably. The women came from a range of backgrounds but all lived fairly close together within the challenging environment of a deprived market town estate. Here again the similarity of learning experience across and between the individuals within the group was considerable.

Provision funded through LSC ESF co-financing[4], delivered by a community based organisation

A small but significant proportion, in terms of engaging hard to reach individuals, of literacy provision takes place by direct delivery of classes through local neighbourhood and community learning centres in some parts of Lincolnshire. This provision is mainly funded through LSC discretionary funding such as ESF co-financing and LIF[5].

[4] European Social Fund co-financing
[5] Local Intervention and Development Fund – is a discretionary local fund which local LSC can use to support responsive local activity

'English for Adults' class delivered in a community based access centre

As part of the preparation phase for the interview questions, I wanted to make sure that the questions I used were appropriate for the individuals and groups I would be working with. In order to do this, I decided to use a focus group to assist in the development of the interview questions (Kreuger and Cassey, 2000). The focus group was made up of 12 volunteers, mixed in terms of age and gender but all attending the English for Adults class at the centre. In working with the focus group, I asked them the questions that I had developed for the individual questionnaires and noted their responses. I also discussed their responses afterwards with the tutor to identify any issues that had been identified by the questions. Their input and responses enabled me to refine the questions and make them more appropriate in some cases, while in others I was able to make changes which made understanding and dialogue easier during the later interviews. I was also able to clarify differences in vocabulary and correct assumptions I had made that the groups would automatically be familiar with certain terminology and references. Using the focus group was extremely valuable and contributed to the success of the interviews during the main part of the study.

As well as the focus group, I interviewed two of these learners. Both had been attending the class for several years and were also regular attendees and volunteers at the local Community Centre where the class was taking place. The Centre was in the middle of an estate in a deprived ward and has been established for several years. It is very much a focus for community activity and offered a wide range of services and support to local residents, including benefit advice, a range of learning opportunities and internet / computer access. While not accessing LSC main stream funding for learning delivery, the Centre has received funds through the LSC's ESF co-financing initiative to deliver support and learning opportunities to adults on their local estate.

This chapter has introduced the main features of the study, considering the reasons for my interest in the research and how the specific topic developed. It has stated the overarching question which I wanted to answer and identified the two strands of enquiry underpinning the development of the research questions. Gaps were highlighted in terms of the identification of other studies on related topics, my decision to focus on individual experiences of formal learning activity outlined and a brief geographical context for the study given. The chapter also described the types of provider and specific classes and venues used. Chapter two builds on this introduction and further refines the research questions through an examination of the relevant literature, looking at elements of social policy, development of adult skills policy in general and the Skills for Life strategy in particular.

Chapter 2 : Literature review

Context for the research

Centralised policy development seems 'dislocated' from policy implementation at a local level (Hill, 2003). The intent of nationally developed policy does not take sufficient account of local implementation needs and this, in turn, affects how a particular policy impacts on an individual or community (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Since policy development is framed alongside a prevailing political environment (Hill, 2003), it is designed with broad national priorities in mind, often with identified target groups as its recipients. It is developed in a 'top down' way, based on what those with influence and power determine is the best way forward, to achieve the policy outcomes (Bochel et al, 2007). The tendency is to regard all those within a particular target group as having similar needs, whereas in reality each individual has a unique set of circumstances relating to their life experience (Barton et al, 2006) as well as their physical situation, which can influence the impact a particular policy can have. The further away the detail of policy development is from its' implementation sites, the less likely it is to be flexible enough to address a broad range of individual needs at a local level (Taylor and Wilson, 2006).

Adult Skills policy is an example of how this approach to policy making and implementation happens and is directly related to my experience, working in a local Learning and Skills Council office. Within the context of adult learning, this centralised approach, according to Coffield et al (2005) means that structures implementing policy are focussed on national strategic objectives, at the expense of local flexibility. This results in a 'one size fits all' approach that does not take into account the range of needs of individuals even if those individuals are broadly characterised as being part of identified target groups for the policy.

The reason for the apparent 'dislocation' is that policy, developed from the centre, even though implemented at a local level, makes insufficient allowance for people's past experiences (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Individuals bring with them differing experiences and meeting their needs requires a complex pattern of delivery and support options which cannot necessarily be addressed with a 'one size fits all' approach (Schuller et al, 2004).

Policy theory is developed centrally using a range of mechanisms based on "what is needed." (Hill, 2003). However, these 'needs' are determined by what he calls 'majority influencers' who are in a position of power and influence. Within the current focus on adult skills, the 'needs' link to national imperatives, such as, improving the skills of the workforce to enable the UK to compete effectively in a globalised economy and these are articulated by the government and its major influencers such as employers (BIS, 2009). Policy developed in this centralised way lacks sufficient flexibility to take into account the diverse needs of individuals at local level (Coffield et al, 2005). When this is combined with centralised control of funding, complex reporting structures and unrealistic timeframes, it can result in policy content which is not compatible with the local and personal context within which it needs to be implemented (Newman, 2002). The purpose of the research is not necessarily to argue against the need for centralised principles for policy development. It aims to take a considered view of the effect of increased centralised control on the capacity of local structures to deliver implementation strategies or programmes which meet local and individual needs while at the same time achieving policy aims. Certainly, the current approach contrasts with the Learning and Skills Council's policy implementation in the past. An example is the LSC's response to the Government's Delivering Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2000). Local LSC offices were much less constrained at that time in how they were able to develop local approaches to delivering broad policy aims. Each local LSC was able to develop its' own Skills for Life approach (Lincolnshire and Rutland LSC, 2001) and determine how the allocated budget could be spent in support of delivery. This local

approach was very successful in delivering against the identified local Skills for Life targets (Lincolnshire and Rutland LSC, 2004) In the past, when policy was developed at this more local level, it was based on broad 'guidance' from national structures. This meant it was possible to take into account a wider range of individual needs, such as geographical isolation, the need for one to one support, and community outreach and these could, in turn, be addressed through flexible approaches to delivery. This is increasingly not the case and the effects are problematic in respect of delivering policy impacts which meet individual needs at an individual and community level.

The research attempts to evidence this 'dislocation' between policy development and policy impact by matching policy intention to the experiences of those who participate in a particular policy programme. To do this, taking one aspect of current Adult Skills policy as an example, the research will focus on the experiences of individuals enrolled on Literacy courses in a range of delivery contexts in Lincolnshire. The study will consider the descriptions of previous and current learning experiences given by these learners to identify whether or not there is evidence of dislocation between the intent and its' impact. The study uses the current Skills for Life strategy iteration (DIUS, 2006) as a example of a current policy in action.

The aim of the study is to establish if what individuals' tell us about their experiences of learning has implications for the way in which current Skills for Life policy is implemented at a local level and to what extent does increasing centralisation of policy development limit the ability of local implementation structures to meet the needs of individuals? In working towards a theoretical framework for the study, the literature review explores several elements. Firstly, it considers social policy conception, development and implementation as a background to the increased centralisation of policy development during the last ten years. Next, it then explores the notion of the Government's Adult Skills agenda as a social policy, considering the implications for local implementation of centralised development

mechanisms, which meet the needs and expectations of the developers and influencers (Hill, 2003; Newman et al, 2002) rather than those of individuals within identified target groups. The third element focuses on Skills for Life policy development and local implementation as an example of the current increased centralisation of policy development in practice. Fourthly, it links implementation of policy to its impact on individuals by reflecting on the way in which an individual's experience can create a range of barriers for learners as they participate in other learning activity (McGivney, 2001). It then considers the way in which policy decisions often target physical and structural barriers but do not take into account other personal and intrinsic ones which can affect the impact that a policy can have on an individual (McGivney, 2001; Barton et al, 2006). The final section of the chapter outlines a theoretical framework for the research and articulates the research questions which the study sets out to explore, in preparation for developing the methodological approach described in Chapter 3.

Social policy – conception, development and implementation

The purpose of social policy is to support society and deliver public welfare, however it is often used to serve the interests of those making the policies (Clarke et al, 2005). As such, it can also be a mechanism for social control (Coffield, 2005) and maintaining order. It is framed positively, in terms of social wellbeing and what is good for society, and is considered as an essential foundation for the effective functioning of the state and a vehicle for delivering a stable, supportive society for its citizens. Gough (1979) believes that welfare and social policies were used as a way of maintaining the societal status quo which is essential to governments in ensuring that there is a 'useable workforce', (Gough 1979). Social policies are closely aligned to economic development, although increasingly the balance between social and economic priority is shifting, with economic necessity gaining increasing prominence in public discourse. Over the past twelve years, New Labour have focussed on using social policies to move towards a more equal society. Hill (2003) believes

that they have had success across a range of policy areas. However, in respect of local context, this has resulted in a centralised approach to policy development which has increased implementation pressures on local agencies but removed the ability of these structures and individuals to influence policy development. Bochel et al (2007) considers the extent to which individual recipients are involved in policy development and implementation, concluding that "most 'users' are not represented at all in any policy making process" (Bochel et al, 2007). Those with most influence in the development of these policies are often those furthest away from the implementation sites, creating the potential for a fundamental dislocation between policy content and the context in which it is to be implemented. Social policy is developed by governments and their attendant interest groups with the aim of delivering the dominant political vision. Each policy is aimed at delivering its impact across a range of target groups. These 'target groups' are often those least likely to be able to influence policy and yet these individuals are the ones who experience the impact of these policies. When linked to current, powerful public messages about the need for a particular approach for the good of society, they create formidable mechanisms of social direction, serving, for the most part, the interests of those making the policy, (Coffield, 2005).

Continuous change in social policy development over the past twelve years has been linked to significant changes in political direction. Newman (2002) refers to two views about how social policy is created. Firstly, the view of Hogwood and Gunn (1984) that policy development is linear, with implementation being the least significant stage in the process. She contrasts this with Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) who consider that policy development is incremental and creative, and that it is shaped in line with local pressures. In a local adult learning context, the incremental and creative view has significant appeal, and from experience was very much the approach used in the early days of the local Learning and Skills Councils. However, with increasing regionalisation of the LSC and the focus on the national skills agenda (Leitch, 2006), this is no

longer the case, and the approach is much closer to the linear model of Hogwood and Gunn (1984).

Increasing centralisation of policy development has resulted in a lessening of local influence and control over the form that implementation programmes will take (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Yet as this influence lessens, the move to implementation through an increasing range of local partnerships increases. This raises a question as to whether this is an attempt to legitimise delivery of remote policies by giving it a local image and particularly by giving responsibility to local bodies such as councils and third sector organisations. Newman (2002) notes the attempt of the government to control and enforce performance while at the same time putting implementation into the hands of local partnerships. From a local perspective, this does not, however, influence policy intention. There is still a loss of localness even though delivery partnerships are proliferating and are held increasingly accountable for the delivery of policy outcomes.

Social policy is conceived and developed by those who have an interest in the outcome of that policy rather than those on whom it will impact. Hill (2003) asks who is able to influence policy development, and concludes that there are a range of interest groups and those he refers to as 'majority influencers' These are organisations and individuals who are able to directly participate in the policy process by virtue of their power and influence with policy makers. Once the policy theory is developed, it is converted into specific programmes with goals and outputs which are once again constrained by 'influencers' in terms of funding, timescales, eligibility and so forth. These programmes are usually couched in the language of the dominant discourse. In Adult Skills policy terms, this would be the adult skills deficit, the knowledge economy and globalisation, and increasingly most recently, the notion of social justice. However, as Hill (2003) points out the impact of policy will also depend on individual determinants, 'environmental factors', which will include individual experiences and interactions. These will be significant, not

only for individual impact, but also in determining how successful the policy will be in achieving its' outcomes. Also of significance is the absence of feedback mechanisms from local implementation activity. While evaluation is built into policy delivery, this often takes the form of case studies evidencing 'good' practice, which would seem to be self selecting, since to be considered as good practice, it would need to be evidence of the policy working. Other approaches to evaluation such as independent consultants are given specific terms of reference which focus on particular elements of the programme. A particular approach currently is to trial different parts of an overall policy across a range of sites. This gives a fragmented view, which can sometimes mask how one element of a programme can duplicate or complicate the delivery of another element. An recent example of this is the roll out of Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials across the country. Some elements such as Skills Accounts have been implemented in some LSC areas (for example, the East Midlands) but not in others, whereas other aspects such as Skills Health Checks which are linked to Skills Accounts (BIS, 2009) in the overall approach to IES, have not been trialled in the East Midlands. This means that the evidence picture emerging from the different trial elements can be fragmented, and there is no one area where all the elements have been evaluated as a coherent whole. There is the same lack of co-ordination when it comes to gathering feedback from local programmes. The incorporation of individual feedback is usually included in the initial rhetoric surrounding policy roll out, but can be be diluted in large scale studies and as such have little real influence. It is this lack of responsiveness that contributes to the sense of 'dislocation' locally.

Implementation of policy takes place within multiple contexts, which are influenced by a broad range of factors. There are problems for implementation when the aims and content of policy are centrally developed and thus not able to make allowances for localised considerations such as individual needs, accessibility for target groups, geographical impact. Hill (2003) identifies an all too familiar frustration at a local implementation level, in asking why policies are

inappropriate for the issues and problems confronted on the front line of delivery? In referring to contemporary studies of both policy making and policy implementation, Hill (2003) suggests that we need to give attention to some very complex relationships between "the mixed goals of those able to influence policies and the varied consequences of their interventions". He concludes that implementation is a neglected part of the study of policy and that further work needs to be carried out in this area. This links the topic of my research to an area of articulated need within the established literature dealing with social policy, i.e. its implementation and impact. The study will attempt to look at some of the 'varied consequences of their interventions', through the described experiences individual policy recipients. Part of the reason behind this research is a frustration with this 'neglected part' of the study of policy. Newman (2002) considers that implementation has continued to be neglected as a valid field of empirical study within the policy literature." From a local perspective, policy content is increasingly isolated from policy context and this is a further reason for carrying out the research.

The impact of any policy on individuals will depend on how it is interpreted and put into practice at a local level. If flexibility at local level is limited, then the ability to meet a range of individual needs is also restricted, rendering the policy content less effective and the policy outputs less certain. Most policy impacts on individuals are assumed to be positive because the purpose and content of that policy is framed in terms of the greater public good. However, Griffin (1987) makes the point that an individual's benefit and the benefits to society of a particular policy are not always the same. In a local context, it is clear that as funding for adult skills, in pursuit of the national skills strategy (Leitch, 2006), becomes increasingly targeted at qualifications and employability, the accessibility to a broad range of learning environments and opportunities which used to be available at a local level, is being increasingly restricted.

Adult skills policy – Learning Age to Leitch

Griffin (1987) considers adult education to be an example of a social policy, and its development has been closely linked to the delivery of political change through successive governments. During the tenure of the current government, there has been a significant shift in the focus of adult education policy from the early ideas expressed through the 'Learning Age' (DfES, 1999) to the current refresh of the Leitch Review of Skills (HM Treasury, 2006). Adult Education, now renamed through the dominant political discourse as Adult Skills, is focussed on the delivery of skills and qualifications aimed at improving individual employability and the national competitive advantage in the global economy. Closely aligned with economic policy, Adult Skills is framed in terms of what is needed for the individual and for society. The goals identified in the Learning Age were those of a social agenda delivering social justice and an economic agenda delivering prosperity. Now the two have combined within the Adult Skills policy with the message that economic prosperity will deliver social justice (Denham, 2008). The distinction between social policy with its benefits accruing to individuals and economic policy for the common good (Griffin, 1987) has, in recent times, become blurred. There has been an increasing domination of education policies by economic aims as the move to entrench adult skills as a priority for adult learning budgets has moved ahead. It can be argued that with the current economic downturn, any remaining barriers to this have been removed as the case for shifting all available resources to the delivery of skills and employability becomes unassailable in the prevailing political context.

Adult Skills policy has similarities to other social policies. Characteristics of current policy development such as the rhetoric of increased choice as a proxy for individual control of entitlement are emphasised (DBIS, 2009). Increased choice of venue and timing for example, is always clearly stated in the implementation guidance supporting a new policy directive. This contrasts with other elements

of Adult Skills policy such as range of qualifications available; number of providers able to access funding; minimum class sizes; focus of programmes on employability and access to mentoring support, where very limited choice is available because of the national and regional ring fencing of funding. In Adult Skills terms, you can have any course you like, as long as it improves your employability. In a similar way to the introduction of individual care allowances through Health and Social Care budgets, Skills accounts are the equivalent of individual budgets in a skills context and are intended to place funding, and therefore choice, in the hands of the individual. However they are only virtual, showing indicative funding levels and confer no real choice or access to funding. The sense of the inherent 'goodness' of adult learning which incorporates choice and variety has given way to a more economically strident focus on skills and employability, devolving considerable pressure to conform on the individual but offering less and less meaningful choice. "Individuals must take responsibility for their own personal career development, and be prepared to learn and relearn new skills." (John Healy, 2003).

Clarke et al (2006) say that choice is spoken of as an aim of public policy but questions whether that choice is really empowering? Choice is increasingly used as a substitute for consistent good quality emerging from policy intention. This is an indicator of a mismatch between policy intention and policy impact. Giving choice implies a shift of the responsibility for improving quality to the consumer of the policy rather than the developer and implementer. This also seems to devolve to the consumer the responsibility of reconciling wants, needs and resources. The 'user' is given resources and it is up to them to get the best value they can. However, the context within which they can use their resources is controlled so choice is limited while at the same time being offered. In an Adult Skills context, individual choice is conferred potentially through access to a Skills Accounts but even so, individuals' cannot directly access the funding. Firstly, they may not actually be eligible depending on whether or not they fall into a particular target group,

and secondly, the funding cannot be spent directly, as it is routed through Further Education Colleges, thus limiting choice of provider. This can be of particular concern in rural areas where distance between providers can be significant. Availability of funding also limits the choice of course, since only some courses are eligible for funding in this way. This is an example of 'dislocation' between the promise and practice of choice, which echoes the 'dislocation' between development of policy and its' implementation.

Over the past twelve years, New Labour has developed its' economic focus on skills through a series of policy developments. Early on, the link between learning, skills and economic prosperity was established at the highest level. In support of the transformation of Lifelong Learning policy, the Prime Minister (SEU, 1999) stated that, 'The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience'. It was a central to New Labour policy, from The Learning Age, (DfEE, 1998) and the subsequent 1999 White Paper – Learning to Succeed, (DfEE, 1999a) through 21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential (Leitch, 2003) and Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work (DfES, 2005) to the imperatives for the nation's economic future set out in World Class Skills (Leitch 2006).

The Government's vision of an economically focussed, endlessly empowering society offering it's citizens the skills-orientated grappling hooks they need to attach themselves to the cliff face of globalisation as they attempt to climb it, has been relentless. In David Blunkett's foreward to The Learning Age, (DfEE, 1998), it was possible to discern a societal and community focussed agenda. However, since then priorities have changed and changed rapidly. Increasingly, the focus of policy development is on helping those considered to be socially excluded, in a range of target groups, on to the path to higher skills and therefore greater economic prosperity. Policy has become progressively narrowly focused which means less flexibility for individuals to decide what support they need in transforming their own circumstances in ways which they identify as

being most relevant for them. The Learning and Skills Act of 2000 (DfES, 2000) established the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and gave it a remit for planning and funding all of post-16 provision (with the exception of Higher Education) in England. The LSC's mandate was to further develop vocational training for young people and adults; ensure delivery of high quality, demand-led provision; and to widen participation in skills focussed learning for disadvantaged and socially excluded groups.

In the early years, local LSC's were responsible for the majority of planning and funding decisions which affected their local areas. As policies were developed at national level, they took the form of broad national principles and it was left to individual LSC's to develop local policy and programmes to deliver against local needs. The approach to targets and funding allocations was flexible within a broad national framework. With each iteration of government policy however, meaningful local influence on what could be delivered and how become less and less. The significant discretionary funding allocations through Local Intervention funds were diminishing, while at the same time there were increasing restrictions on how the remaining funding could be spent. With internal reorganisation through 'Theme 7', the role of local LSCs in the determination and planning of policy was all but eliminated and regional structures were put in place to take over this function. Increasingly since then, local LSCs have become implementers of decisions rather than being able to contribute to decision making. Characterised by an increasing amount of central control being exerted on the development of Adult Skills policy, the emphasis is being placed on learning for improving skills as central to accessing employment. The need for individual relevance (McGivney, 2001) and the validity of a personal context for learning are all but eliminated as current policy is rolled out. These changes are justified as accessing a higher income for the individual, greater economic prosperity for the nation, and delivering social justice (Leitch, 2006). 21st Century Skills (DfES, 2003), while acknowledging the need for learning as a function of developing communities, seats the development of these communities firmly in

the economic context of the skills and the needs of a 21st century, globally focused economy. Individuals are asked to accept the demise of 'a job for life' in favour of employability for life, and 'the interdependence of social justice and economic success',(DfES, 2003). Community development and empowerment are framed increasingly in the discourse of economics and in encouraging deprived communities to take up the skills challenge, that all is 'dependent on raising our skills game' (DfES, 2003). A survey commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council as part of the promotional activity for the Skills Campaign (LSC, 2007a) reports to have found that 'more than a third of people in the poll confessed to envying the skills and abilities of others, whereas only 4% felt jealous of other people's beauty' (Training Zone, 2007). Non-participation is increasingly characterised as 'negative' with individual responsibility being emphasised and an increasing expectation that individuals will do the right thing and take advantage of what is being made available to them. Once again the notion of responsibility and choice are linked through the individual (Clarke et al, 2006)

There are those who have voiced their concerns with the direction of travel, pointing out that a narrow focus on skills will have consequences for the broader accessibility of adult learning. In its' response to the Skills Strategy consultation (NIACE, 2007) points out that:

> 'We are also concerned that adopting an approach that examines the Skills Strategy strand by strand is in danger of 'not seeing the wood for the trees'. Clear evidence is emerging that the Skills Strategy, with its narrow focus for example on Skills for Life and 'full fat' Level 2 is having and will continue to have a devastating impact on adult learning and skills, in effect narrowing opportunities, including in the realm of 'First steps learning'. If the Skills Strategy decreases the overall volumes of adult learners, then that could well widen disparities and increase inequality overall.'

With the increasing emphasis on skills as a focus for adult learning funding across Further Education and even into discretionary funding such as Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities, which is now 75% focused on employability, comes the regionalisation of the LSC and its metamorphosis into a fully regional Skills Funding Agency from April 2010. In this iteration, the SFA will be responsible for a regional skills policy which aims to deliver against the regional employment agenda. The role of the Skills Funding Agency (DBIS, 2009) will be to:

- move towards a demand-led system where funding flows according to the actual choices made by individuals and employers;

- build a coherent lead agency on adult skills, which acts on the articulated demands of both employers and learners.

The current economic downturn has resulted in a rapid realignment of the bulk of adult funding for learning towards supporting Integrated Employment and Skills (IES), based on the needs of key sectors and increasing employability for those not in work. There is little scope within this current Adult Skills approach for that learning which is not linked to this. The domination of education policy by economic objectives (Woolf et al, 2006) is for the most part complete, certainly in the context of public funding for learning activity. Questions about whether or not this skills policy is fit for purpose and will ultimately achieve its' goals remain however. Woolf et al (2006) assert that current skills policy is "seriously misconceived in design and execution." This research attempts to understand what impact this 'execution' (implementation) can have on some learners, by understanding the experience legacy it can leave behind.

Skills for Life – policy in practice

In order to understand the relevance of local implementation for individuals' experience, with respect to the impact of Adult Skills

policy, the study focuses on one particular aspect of Adult Skills policy i.e. Skills for Life. This was a priority area for New Labour policy development in the earliest days of their government. The Skills for Life strategy, arising out of the recommendations of the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) was conceived nationally through the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit but was implemented by local Learning and Skills Councils who developed individual Skills for Life strategies (L&R LSC, 2000) to meet the needs of their own areas. Over the past several years, as part of the process of implementing the government's Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001), there have been major changes in the way that literacy, numeracy and language provision is delivered. This section will focus on some of the more recent developments which chart the progress of Skills for Life policy changes. The research will use the experiences of learners to look at the potential impact of policy changes on individuals and how this might relate to local policy implementation. Although Skills for Life policy covers literacy, numeracy and language provision, the methodology will focus on individuals taking part in literacy classes only.

An acknowledgement of the causality between low literacy and numeracy skills and difficulties in gaining and keeping work has been at the core of education policy for successive governments. Adult basic skills provision was formally made part of the FE system in the 1992 Act, mainly in the form of accredited qualifications, and bringing with it increased formality and structure in what was offered to learners. Here was a foretaste of the economic agenda in the formalisation of qualifications and introduction of changes to the accepted approaches of teaching adults (Holton and Swanson, 1998). With the curriculum set by government agencies and the funding emphasis being on qualifications as evidence as achievement, there was less scope for tutors to negotiate with learners, (McGivney, 2001; Barton et al, 2006) how they could be involved meaningfully in the development of their own learning. Rogers (2002) considers that what often seems like negotiation with

learners is in fact constructed to create 'buy in' to predetermined norms without learners being aware of it.

The considerable increase in momentum from this point on with regard to government support for, and significant funding of, adult basic skills links back to the recent history of adult basic education when new education initiatives in the late 1990s raised the profile and reasserted the agenda of literacy programmes. The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, significantly shifted the focus of adult education as well as putting forward the economic constructs of the 'knowledge economy' and the 'knowledge society'(Fieldhouse,1996). At this time there was considerable international influence from the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as a result of the International Literacy Survey (OECD, 2000) which created a league table of nations according to the levels of literacy of their citizens. This survey made links between the economic and global competitiveness of a country and the relative skills levels of its peoples. At the time of the survey, lack of literacy skills was considered in terms of a deficiency model, it did not consider other more individually centered factors such as the central role of culture and power relationships in influencing access for disadvantaged learners, (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). At this time, the Conservative government regarded literacy and numeracy skills as key to developing increasing global competitiveness and their focus was on developing a skilled workforce and New Labour continued this policy focus.

However, once New Labour came to power in 1997, social inclusion was included as a key part of their social policy, although linked to skills and ministers strongly supported the concept of Lifelong Learning in particular as a way out of poverty and unemployment for socially excluded groups. A Fresh Start (DfEE, 1999) highlighted the extent of the national problem, with 7 million adults having some difficulties with their literacy and numeracy skills. The report recommended a more controlled system of provision with a national core curriculum, new national qualifications, better and more

professionalised teacher training, and framed this in terms of the entitlement of adults to literacy and numeracy provision. A major recommendation of the report was that there should be a national strategy on improving adult basic skills. The Government's response to the Report recommendations was 'Delivering Skills for Life' (DfES, 2001) which outlined a new national Skills for Life strategy to be measured by national targets for achievement. The initial target was for 750,000 individuals to achieve a national qualification by 2004, increasing to 1,5 million by 2007. A further target was added of 2.25 million by 2010. Achievement of the targets was to be underpinned by vastly expanded provision mainly through Further Education colleges and local authority Adult Education provision, as well as through voluntary organisations. Also included in the new Strategy was the importance of local partnerships for the identification of local needs; a higher level of tutor qualification and increased professional development. Funding for the new strategy was directed by the Learning and Skills Council with each local LSC adopting a proportion of the overall national target, being given significant local capacity building funding and the flexibility to plan their own local approach with partners. Local Learning and Skills Councils were given the responsibility of developing their local plans and delivery partnerships as well as building the capacity to deliver the increased volume of participation opportunities and achievements (LSC, 2001).

However, over time, policy coming from government was increasingly overtaken by the current 'Skills for Life' construct. It was characterised by increasing standardisation through formal education structures and assessment processes. While the government emphatically supported the new approach using the rhetoric of lifelong learning and social inclusion, used by David Blunkett's in his Foreward to the Learning Age (DfEE, 1998), the focus was firmly that of economic improvement and the vocational rationale which was to become increasingly dominant. Crowther et al (2001) noted the potential difficulties in reconciling everyday experience of literacy with the different literacy practices used in the different areas of social, work and community life. It would be increasingly difficult to maintain

the rhetoric of empowering people when what is really available to them, is concerned with the narrow focus of upskilling the workforce. This technical approach of the Skills for Life strategy obscures the power imbalances which contribute to the current dominant economic discourse around literacy (Hamilton and Barton, 2000).

The appropriation of terms such as partnership, commitment, teamwork and empowerment have taken place within an increasingly prescriptive context that is not liberating at all though it strives to appear so. Part one of the Skills Strategy (DfES/DTI/DWP, 2005) points out that:

> '....this exciting agenda cannot be delivered top down or by the Government alone. It will require a strong partnership in every area between the key public agencies, employers of all sizes in the private, public and voluntary sectors, schools, colleges, universities and training providers, trade unions and individuals, whether in work or seeking employment. As we have proved over the last eight years, our commitment to sustained investment and the reform of our education and training system is central to our vision for a fair society and successful economy.'

Here the implication is clearly partnership in development as well as delivery, however the reality has not lived up to the promise. Stakeholders, including the Learning and Skills Council, are invited to work together locally to deliver a fairer society and a more prosperous future for the nation, for communities and the individual. The individual, tasked with becoming a partner in 'this exciting agenda' (DTI/SWP, 2005), was increasingly sidelined as the structures such as Learning Partnerships in which they could participate were dismantled. Street (1998) believes that the increasing marketisation of learning into a commodity, has brought a range of new players onto the scene, all offering knowledge packaged in different way. While outwardly seeming to give access to a wider choice and more opportunity, the single economic

imperative underpinning all of this creates considerable pressures for local delivery and is potentially exploitative for the individual learners.

> "Learning has increasingly been seen as a commodity or as an investment rather than as a way of exploring what might make for the good life or human flourishing." (Smith, 2002)

.....and yet there is very little active debate about these ideas and changes within the organisations charged with carrying the agenda forward. What discussion there is comes from the outside, and this is often not taken account of.

> 'We are expected to march shoulder to shoulder towards a new dawn, when the UK will rise to the top of the OECD league tables for qualifications and participation in education and training. This isn't healthy. Subjecting ideas to constructive public debate should be at the heart of our educational policymaking, so that the expertise and experience of all stakeholders can be used' (Unwin, 2007)

In the context of local delivery, there is an increasing tension for the providers, between the need to satisfy the demands of meeting the achievement targets and the need to ensure that the provision is appropriate and meets the needs of the learners. Skills for Life is included in the local LSC's Statement of Priorities (LSC, 2006) and in the increasingly emphasized Regional Statement of Priorities (LSC, 2006a) however the emphasis of the funding is being directed more and more through employer routes or through formal qualifications such as level 2. Support for work at a local level with individuals who are not able or willing to access learning through these routes is increasingly subject to reductions in funding. While the Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2003) emphasises the need to tailor provision to the needs of learners, encouraging locally focussed solutions, the target setting process and access to funding is increasingly regionalised. This is an area of considerable difficulty for some of the providers, particularly those in the further education and adult education sectors

as they see themselves as increasingly constrained by the requirements of their contracts with the Learning and Skills Council.

In reviewing the literature for the study, it is has been difficult to identify clear evidence of robust research discernable in the development of government policy on adult skills. Crafting the Skills for Life policy derived most of its momentum from the developing Skills imperative rather than on considering the research available on what individuals, particularly those who can be considered to be on the fringes of participation, might actually need. This is a constant area of tension for providers and professionals involved in delivering learning to adults and many of these professionals have deep misgivings about the direction of current learning and skills policy and how it impacts at a local level (Woolf et al, 2006; Newman, 2001; Coffield, 2005). My view is that it is essential to view the impact of these policy developments through the lens of the individual's experience, since it is these experiences, which will ultimately influence whether or not they continue to engage with the system. What do learners think of the provision they are taking part in? What are the current learning experiences that they are having and does what they are experiencing now impact on whether they continue with learning in the future? How do they perceive the government's 'skills for life' policy impacting on them, if it does? All of these questions contribute to the basic premise of the research, which is to examine whether the experiences of learners give us information on impact of current policy and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of those learners.

The focus of the current Skills for Life policy is the engagement of those individuals who have benefited least from learning in the past, particularly those who lack functional literacy, language or numeracy skills. The policy highlights a range of broad target groups identified in the Leitch Review of Skills (HM Treasury, 2006), such as unemployed/benefit claimants; offenders/ex-offenders and low skilled employed individuals (DIUS, 2009). This latest iteration of Skills for Life policy has achievement targets specifically identified as those

considered to be the minimum level for employability i.e. entry level 3 numeracy and level 1 literacy. While funding still supports the full range of qualifications identified in the original policy (DfES, 2001), the LSC is requiring providers to increasingly focus on the 'Leitch' qualifications and these are the qualifications that are measured and reported on. While the targets are seen as economically justified (NAO, 2008), the policy implementation is increasingly one dimensional. There is less funding to support essential engagement activity, and a range of informal courses which encourage progression into formal qualifications. Discretionary spending at local LSC level is diminishing and that funding still available is specifically not available for the delivery of literacy or numeracy courses. This limits the range and extent of delivery available locally and while the policy identifies specific groups as key targets, the limitations imposed through funding and other constraints, means that local flexibility and innovation in meeting the needs of individuals within these broad groups is extremely limited. Each individual, whether in a 'target group' or not, is motivated to learn, or not, by personal circumstances, needs and attitudes. Their decision to participate in learning will be based on perceived value of the learning activity, its accessibility, and the extent to which the individual's needs are met.

Experience and Barriers to Participation in Learning

The development of policy is framed in terms of its intended results. In order to achieve the desired outcomes, policy is aimed at delivering a particular set of interventions for target areas or target groups. For the most part, certainly within Adult Skills policy development, these target groups are those who are seen to be 'in deficit' with respect to those outcomes that the policy is aiming to achieve i.e. no or low skills. Guidance is issued alongside new policy content which sets out a framework including funding levels, within which the policy can be implemented. This also includes eligibility criteria, identifying target groups who are able to be beneficiaries of the policy. With the increasing centralization of policy development, there has been a loss of flexibility at a local level in how particular

elements of a policy can be applied in practice. The more specific the policy guidance is about who can benefit from the policy and how, the less possibility there is for local discretion and support being available to meet the needs of individuals with these identified target groups.

Lone parents are one 'target group' at the centre of several current developments in government policy (DWP, 2009). Asserting that work is good for families, (DWP, 2009) lone parents will increasingly be required to move towards entering employment as a condition of their receiving benefit. However, each individual within this 'target group', will have a range of particular circumstances and experiences which will effect how the policy intention impacts on that individual and their family. Every member of a target group, while having some similar characteristics to other members of the group will also have unique experiences which will influence how a particular policy will impact on them.

Griggs et al (2007) consider that "the effect of a policy on a person is a product of the characteristics of the person." While a policy may be intended to have a particular effect or outcome, and may have been designed or targeted in a particular way to achieve a result, the individual outcomes will be determined by the impact that it has on those it is aimed at. Individuals bring a range of factors with them into any interactions they may have, and these factors will have been influenced in part by the experiences they have had. An individual's previous experiences of learning activity can influence their subsequent experiences. Barnes et al (2004) refer to the failure "to acknowledge either the differentiated nature of identity or the significance of the process of identify construction" in the development and implementation of social policy. Why individuals' engage with policy and how they do so is partly a function of previous experiences they have had. According to Barton et al (2006), it is important, in a learning context, that provision 'recognises and responds to people's practical constraints' but that it is also vital to take into account that people bring with them a range of barriers which include not only physical, but also 'mental, social and

emotional constraints'. Each of these potential barriers can have an impact on the level of motivation an individual may feel about engaging with a policy programme. To give the best chance of successful participation, the implementation of policy needs to take into account an individual's current circumstances as well as their learning and life histories (Barton et al, 2006).

Rogers (2002) also describes motivation to learn as being related to several factors including the interplay between the individual and their experiences. An individual's decision to take part in a learning activity will be the result of a complex interaction between their past, their present and their 'imagined future' (Barton et al, 2006). McGivney (2001) suggests that motivation to learn reflects the individual's social and economic experience as well as personal and cultural issues. There are practical, external reasons for their choices as well as intrinsic, personal motivations. There is also what Smith and Spurling (2001) identify as experiences related to family and community. The level of an individual's motivation has the potential to influence not only their decision to take up learning in the first place, but may also have a considerable influence on the success of that learning activity from the perspective of the individual. The reasons why people do or don't participate are numerous, some linked to previous experience or personal circumstances, others influenced by actual or perceived structural barriers (McGivney, 2001) and others related to the content or context of the activity itself. Hill (2003) refers to policy outputs being influenced by 'environmental' factors. These can include individual experiences and capacity; the relationships they have with 'significant others' and their interactions and experiences. What has happened to an individual will have an influence on the impact that a particular policy has on that individual. Thus, the impact of policy on the individual depends on past experiences as well as the intention of the policy.

The context of participation or non-participation in learning is closely linked to notions of disadvantage. Disadvantage is often used interchangeably with terms such as disengaged, hard to help, hard to

reach, and minority particularly in the discourse of policy development and implementation. However, Clyne (1972) points out that there is a distinction between minority and disadvantage. An individual can be part of a minority group without necessarily being disadvantaged or disengaged. Similarly, Field (2006) points out that there is active self-exclusion where individuals are deciding not to participate, as well as those who are not aware or passively 'indifferent'. The fact remains though that there are individuals who do not participate in learning activity whether as a result of lack of motivation, specific barriers, being unaware of what is available or through active disinterest. However, Adult Skills policy increasingly emphasizes the importance of the individual needing to take responsibility for their own learning as part of a process of economic development (Raggatt et al, 1996). The individual is encouraged to participate not only in their own interests, but also in those of the national economic interest (LSC, 2007a). In casting non-participation as a deficit in terms of learning and skills, individuals are increasingly pressurised to take up this responsibility (Coffield, 1999). For those that are not engaged in learning activity as adults, McGivney (2001) identifies a range of barriers which influence participation in formal learning. These barriers are identified as policy, structural or organisational and personal as well as cultural.

The existence of these internal and external barriers, created as a result of an individual's experiences, are considered by Barton et al (2006). The work is part of the major NRDC study 'Adult Learners Lives' which has researched in considerable depth, reasons why adults participate in learning and what are the potential reasons why they don't participate. Barton et al (2006) position the learner within a life context which includes their past history, current circumstances and their imagined future. It is against this internal, personal framework that the individual's decisions about participation in learning are made. Government policy aims to encourage adults to gain new skills and is focused on encouraging those with no or low skills to participate. The current Adult Skills discourse characterises learning as a good thing, and labels those not in employment as

'workless'. Broad policy implementation does not take into account situations when poor previous experience of learning becomes a motivator for actively choosing NOT to participate. Limiting local flexibility to shape implementation strategies means that programmes are often not flexible enough to meet the range of needs which the individuals within the target group may have.

Summary

The main interest of the study is the 'dislocation' between policy development and policy implementation and how this 'dislocation' affects the impact of policy at a local level on individuals and communities. The study is particularly focused on understanding this within the context of the Government's Adult Skills policy. Key to the research is being able to relate policy intention to its implementation and impact. The study will be undertaken, using the Government's Skills for Life policy as an example of a current policy developed centrally and implemented at a local level.

The theoretical basis for the study is underpinned by Newman's (2002) view that the implementation of policy and its impact has been neglected as a focus of the empirical study of social policy. Hill (2003) raises the importance of understanding the interactions between the goals of policy, as articulated by those who influence its development, and its consequences. He also concludes that further work needs to be carried out to understand this relationship more clearly. At the same time, the impact of policy also relates to the experiences that an individual has had and Griggs et al (2007) point out that the characteristics of an individual are shaped by their experiences, and that this may also, influence the impact of a particular policy. It is important, then, to consider two aspects in taking the research forward. Firstly to identify how the elements of a policy are implemented locally and secondly to understand the impact of policy through the experiences of individual's within policy target groups.

Underpinning the study is understanding the extent to which increasing centralisation of policy development limits the ability of local implementation structures to meet the needs of individuals. The approach will be to establish if what individuals tell us about their experiences of learning has implications for the way in which current Skills for Life policy is implemented at a local level. Implementation of national skills policy at local level is 'dislocated'. Does what individuals' tell us about their experiences of learning evidence this 'dislocation' between policy intention and its impact on the learner? The research will be undertaken using the following specific research questions:

1. Do an individual's descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning indicate that there are 'personal' factors which may influence their further choices about engaging in formal learning?

2. How do individuals describe their current experiences of formal learning and what are the implications of this for the implementation of national Skills for Life policy at a local level?

The next chapter will expand on the links between the research questions, the theoretical framework and the choice of methodology arising out of the literature review. It will describe the methods to be used and the approach to data collection, in developing an outline for the research. Chapter three will also a review of quality concepts such as the trustworthiness and credibility of the data as well as examining ethical issues relating to the research methods and my role as researcher. Finally, there is a summary of the main points which develops links to the data analysis described in chapter four.

Chapter 3: Methodology and data collection methods

This chapter will first consider some of the theory informing my decision to use a qualitative methodology for the research. Secondly, it will review elements of a theoretical framework arising from the research questions and the literature review. Next, it develops an outline for the study, reflecting on the original plan and the changes that took place as the plan was implemented. Section four describes the specific data collection methods used in the project, gives some general information about the individuals who took part and reflects on some examples from the data collection process. Section five reviews the questions about developing credibility and trustworthiness within qualitative research and identifies some of the ethical points raised by the study. Finally, there is a summary of the main points which develops links to the data analysis described in chapter four.

Methodology

Bassey (1999) identifies a research paradigm as being:

> 'a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the function of research which, when adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the pattern of their thinking and underpins their research actions.'

Fundamentally, I understand research to be an attempt to explain what is going on around us. However, our interpretation of the world and our experience of it will depend on how we consider ourselves to 'exist' in that world, the ontological view that we take. Do human beings inhabit a world which we create through our cultural and social interactions or do we live a 'reality' which exists outside of these cultural interpretations? Our view of reality will, in turn, determine the epistemological approach that we take in designing and carrying out research. Does knowledge consist of discoverable,

hard facts that can be found out and combined with other facts to create laws and rules? Or is it about creative interpretations and perspectives that are as varied as the cultural and social lenses through which they are viewed? These different theories and the researcher's view of them, will influence the choices which are made about the way in which research is conducted and this in turn will impact on the mix of data collection and analysis methods that are chosen (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

In the first stages of planning the study, I was aware of two fundamental approaches to research methodology. The two differing approaches seemed to be the catalyst for considerable debate among researchers and a great deal of literature was devoted to explaining the differences and reflecting on the implications of each for the validity of research. First, the positivist tradition seeing reality as being 'out there', discoverable and not bound by context (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994), was characterised by the search for facts and identified knowledge. The positivist researcher takes the position that appropriate scientific observation and experimentation will enable us to collect data and draw definitive conclusions. These conclusions can then lead to the discovery of some quantifiable 'reality' which can be applied to all situations and can, therefore, be regarded as a universal truth or scientific law. However, this does not, according to Arksey and Knight (1999), take sufficient account of the differences and peculiarities of human interactions within society which can influence the way in which social reality can be viewed and interpreted. On the other side of the debate is interpretive research, which rejects the positivist view that there is a defined, discoverable social reality which can be given in terms of 'general statements about human actions' (Bassey, 1999). Often in the literature, the debate about one position over another, has led to what Arksey and Knight (1999) refer to as 'paradigm wars' between those who support one view and those who support the other. These choices are based on two very different epistemological assumptions, rooted in very different interpretations of reality. From the point of view of a qualitative researcher, a quantitative approach

fails to understand 'meanings' surrounding social life. Whereas the quantitative view is that a qualitative approach to research is tending to use a few examples of some social phenomenon, without any reference to contradictory findings/data. In such a case there are question marks over 'validity' or underpinning 'truth' of such research (Travers, 2001).

On a practical level, the 'pattern of thinking' and 'research actions' that Bassey (1999) refers to will influence the data collection methods that the researcher decides to use to gather data and the ways in which that data is analysed and reviewed. In the positivist and post-positivist tradition, the use of quantitative data collection methods is paramount. Experiments are conducted and measurements made, producing largely numerical data which are analysed scientifically or statistically and the results used to formulate theories which can then be tested by further experiments, each building on the other. The interpretive or constructivist paradigm, on the other hand, sees reality as open to many interpretations with multiple perspectives on events and situations. In an attempt to illuminate these complex realities, qualitative research methods which examine situations through participants' experiences and which create opportunities for flexibility and responsiveness would seem to be most appropriate. Robson (2002) stresses the importance of understanding the meaning of experiences and behaviour in all its complexity and in this way to allow 'concepts' to emerge from the data. Central to my research was to try to understand how experience can influence behaviour within the context of formal learning activity so I was inclined to adopt an approach which took this complexity into account. There was however, considerable heat in the debate, which was even apparent during the various residential weekends for the EdD course. In considering which approach would be best for the research, I was naturally inclined towards a mixed approach with respect to methods but it was clear that I would need to adopt an approach which was most likely to enable the narratives to bring out the main issues for the individuals concerned. Choosing sides seemed to be considered

essential at least by some protagonists, and for me, in those early days, doing so became an obstacle to progressing further with the work. I was frustrated about moving forward, probably concerned more with saying what was wanted, rather than with pursuing the research.

I was able to come to a personal conclusion however, through an article by Martin Hammersley (2005) which, I felt, summarised the debate succinctly. He asserted the validity of combining the two different approaches to data collection and concludes that while there are considerable difficulties in doing so.....

> '.....there is a need for more effort on the part of social and educational researchers to build bridges among different kinds of work and see how these might be usefully combined or integrated.'

Once I had considered this, I was much clearer as to the way forward and in many ways, less intimidated by a perceived need to pick a side. What was needed was a focus on the needs of the research. In my case, I was conducting research into individual experiences where there were potentially complex interactions between individuals and their environment. I therefore considered it was important that the research questions and planning, as well as the methods chosen, reflected this need for a diversity of approach. Accordingly, I decided to use a qualitative approach to designing the research plan and in choosing the specific methods that I would use to collect the data. By doing so, I felt that I was matching the research methods to my research questions. By talking to learners and trying to understand what had influenced their view about formal learning, I would be attempting to understand those 'complex relationships among all that exists' that Stake (1995) describes. These, I felt, underpinned the category identified by Lambouri and Francis (1994) as 'personal/domestic reasons' but this complexity was not made explicit in the research. I have outlined the process through which I developed my approach to the research, and at the heart of it, is the belief that individual experience can offer important

insights into the effectiveness of local policy and the way in which it is developed in the future.

To do this, I looked at past and present experiences of formal learning as reflected in my research questions. Firstly, relating to significant influences on or barriers to participation in formal learning activity by adults and secondly, research which focused on understanding the actual experiences of adult learners. McGivney (2001) examined the broad range of barriers (influences) which individuals experienced with regard to taking part in formal learning. The study covered a broad spectrum of factors, first identified by Cross (1981) as 'situational', 'institutional' and 'dispositional' barriers and their equivalents; policy factors, supply / institutional factors and personal / cultural factors (McGivney, 2001). These factors are considered to have a significant influence on whether an individual decides to participate in formal learning or not. Since the emphasis of my study was on the personal experiences of individuals, I concentrated on the latter category of personal factors. During the analysis process, I found that while individual experiences being described were unique, their impact for an individual's decision making about formal learning was significant.

A further study which forms part of the NRDC Adult Learners Lives project (Barton et al, 2006), added a further dimension to the study. Barton et al (2006) identify a series of commonalities through their work with 'hard to reach' learners in a variety of settings and venues. They consider that these commonalities are also evident in the work of McGivney (2001). Once again the findings identified here resonated with the personal factors identified in my study:

In taking an ethnographic approach to the research, the NRDC study (Barton et al, 2006) builds, in part, on the work of McGivney by relating the specifically narrated experiences of learners to the impacts on their decision making about formal learning and how this relates to their everyday lives. In doing so, 'Relating adults' lives and learning' (Barton et al, 2006) restates the emphasis of McGivney

(1991 and 2001) about the importance of putting the individual at the centre of research into how to engage and retain individuals in formal learning. While the issues at the heart of these experiences might be extremely complex (Kambouri and Francis, 1994), they are, I believe, crucial. They have considerable potential significance in helping to understand why there are some individuals who do not engage. There are considerable implications for those seeking to ensure that implementation of adult skills policy is as effective as possible. The aim of my research was to examine this in more detail and with particular emphasis on its implications for the local implementation of adult skills policy and its' impact on learners.

An important element of the research plan was to consider the individual's past and current experiences of formal learning. I structured the research questions so as to include elements which focused on the individual's previous experiences as well as their current experiences. I wanted to understand the impact that past and present experiences can have on how individuals view themselves in a formal learning context. Barton et al (2006) focus on the inter-relatedness of past and current experience to the way in which the individuals visualize themselves in their 'imagined future' and the impact this has on their engagement with learning.

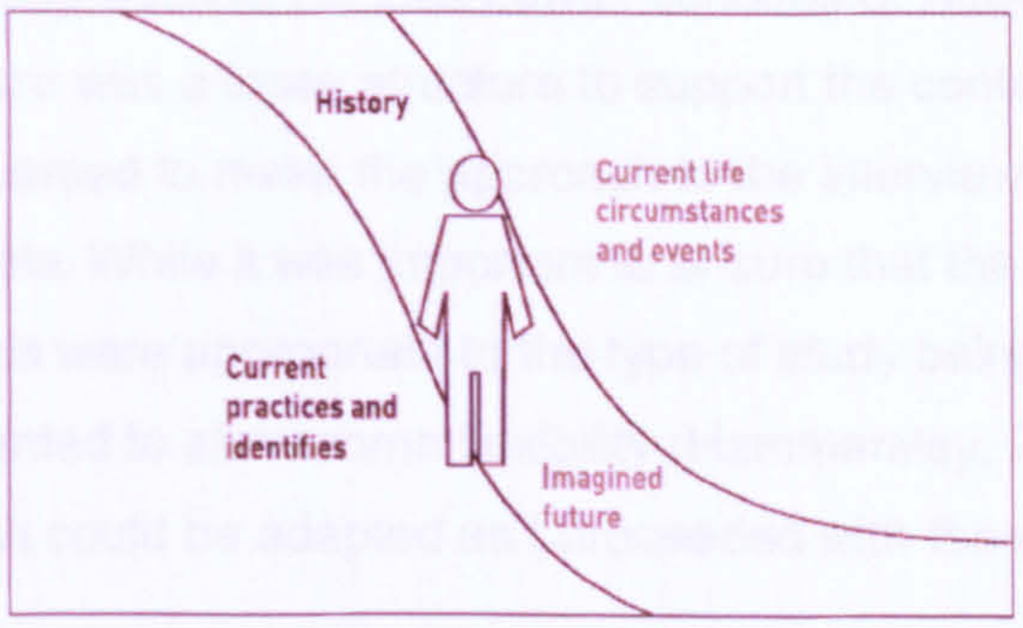

Figure 3.1: Extract from Adult Learners Lives (Barton et al, 2006). This diagram represents the complex elements within which an individual's experience is located.

[6] NB: 'identifies' in the diagram is a misprint in the original, it should read 'identities'.

McGivney (2001) also highlights an individual's lack of a vision of their future as one of the internalised reasons why those who are harder to reach do not readily take-up formal learning as adults. Their previous experience of school and their current every day experiences do not contribute to a positive personal future view of how learning could support change in their lives. For many of the individuals in my study, their current experiences of formal learning activity, often being undertaken as a result of other benefits that were offered in association with it rather than as a result of a conscious individual decision, were the first positive experiences of this kind that they had had. This seemed to be a significant influence on how they viewed the possibility of continuing in further learning and for most individuals had enabled them to rethink their view of learning activity and how it might be for them in the future.

Data collection methods

In deciding on the methods I would use in the research, I wanted to ensure that the approach taken created opportunities for the individual narratives to indicate for themselves which were the main influences on the experiences of the participants (Robson, 2002). It was the individuals' interpretation of the situation which was most important and, I felt that this was best achieved through the use of a semi-structured approach to the interviews I conducted. While ensuring that there was a loose structure to support the content of the interview, I wanted to make the approach to the interviews as flexible as possible. While it was important to ensure that the research methods were appropriate to the type of study being undertaken, I wanted to allow some flexibility (Hammersley, 2005) so that the approach could be adapted as I proceeded with the work

From early consideration of Robson (2002), and subsequently Stake (1995) and Bassey (1999), I decided that I would use case studies as the basis of my research method. I decided to focus on learners from across different types of literacy provision and from a range of providers. The research would concentrate on a small number of

individuals and classes in contrast to the approach taken by Lambouri and Francis (1994), which was a much broader study with, I felt, less richness of detail. I also wanted to make sure that I included several combinations of provision type and delivery site so that I could incorporate a range of views from learners in different situations. This was important to ensure that I was able to compare responses from a variety of learners which would increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the data (Bassey, 1999).

An initial approach – case studies

Stake (1995) considers that there are intrinsic case studies, where the specific interest of the research is the particular individual or situation, and instrumental case studies where there is 'a puzzlement, a need for general understanding', which can be examined through the study of a particular case. In my initial development, I decided to use a case study approach and select several case study sites. It was my view, at the time, that although I was focusing on individual experiences, by using case studies, I might be able to build a more robust understanding of the particular 'puzzlement' of personal/domestic reasons mentioned in the earlier work (Kambouri and Francis, 1994). Initially, I felt the research would benefit from taking this approach (Appendix 2). Case studies are able to incorporate a mix of methods, such as semi-structured interviews, and focus groups but could also include some quantitative aspects such as document review.(Bassey,1999; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2003). In my initial planning, I was keen to include a variety of sources of information to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the data obtained.

At the same time however, there were potential limitations in using case studies in qualitative research. For example, the case study as a method provides 'little basis for scientific generalisation' (Yin, 2003). This lack of potential for scientific generalisation could be seen as problematic since positivist concepts of reliability and validity cannot be readily demonstrated this way. However, my focus was on

an essentially interpretive methodology, concerned with developing an understanding of individual experiences rather than general applicability or generalisation. There was therefore a need to be concerned with other ways to demonstrate the trustworthiness or credibility of the work (Arksey and Knight,1999 ; Bassey, 1999). A further limitation was that case studies are not easily open to cross comparisons as they are studies of one set of events in a unique arrangement of circumstances which it would be difficult to replicate. However, using the categories and commonalities identified by McGivney (2001) and Barton et al (2006) as a comparison would, I felt, add that extra depth to the analysis.

The final research plan - an adapted approach

However, as the early stages of the study developed, I realised I had considerably underestimated the time it would take to carry out the work that I had initially planned. Conducting and transcribing the focus groups and early interviews and doing the analysis of these transcripts took much longer than I had anticipated. Increasingly, this restricted the time I had available to cover the other elements of the case study such as a document review and classroom observations. It was soon clear that the interviews and their analysis were going to take up all the time that I had available. I therefore decided, after discussion with my supervisor, to modify the research plan and not to include the other elements but rather to concentrate on the interviews only. By this time, it was also clear that the interview narratives were extremely interesting and were yielding a considerable amount of significant data to work with. As a result, I restructured the research plan (Appendix 2a) to focus on a range of semi-structured interviews with individuals at several literacy classes across a range of providers. By doing this, I was able to give as much time as possible to the central point of the enquiry i.e. the experiences of the individuals who took part.

Interview schedule and development of questions (Appendix 4)

In designing the initial questions for the semi-structured interviews, I wanted to make sure that I covered all of the broad areas that I wanted to investigate while at the same time allowing flexibility so that I could adapt the progress of the interview as necessary. The questionnaire was developed to include questions relating to the various elements of policy which had been identified. This meant including sections focusing on the individual's experiences of past and present formal learning (Barton et al, 2006) and identifying any personal factors (McGivney, 2001); a section covering the individual's views about skills and the content of their current courses; as well as questions about what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of their current course. The questions were used were indicative only, allowing flexibility for further follow up questions as needed.

The interview needed to be an interactive process between myself, the researcher and interviewee to make it possible for issues and concepts to be brought out (Dey, 1993, p.37). Kvale (1996:32) sums up this complex process;

> 'the interviewer registers and interprets what is said as well as how it is said; he or she must be observant of – and able to interpret – vocalisation, facial expressions, and other bodily gestures.....a qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level.....what is said between the lines.'

As a first step, I developed an outline interview schedule (Appendix 4) which contained guide questions with prompts and probes as appropriate (Arksey and Knight,1999). It was divided into three parts, each one based on one of the research questions. Part one focused on previous experiences of formal learning activity, part two on current experiences and part three on participants views about

specific elements of the Skills for Life policy. Under each section, I listed some initial questions to focus the interview, with suggestions for possible supplementary questions to be used as appropriate. These initial questions were developed and refined based on feedback from the focus groups and from the early interviews. Based on the answers that were given, I added further questions to subsequent interviews to obtain clarity and to explore issues that were raised in more detail.

The key was less formality and more flexibility than for a structured interview where questions are fixed and asked in a set order. I wanted to make sure that the direction of the interview was responsive to the individual's experiences as they wanted to describe them, so this flexible format was essential. Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe 'responsive interviewing' as being shaped, firstly, by the philosophical standpoint taken by the researcher, and secondly, by the practical needs of doing interviews, such as time available, where the interviews will take place and how many individuals are taking part. I would add to this the need to allow enough time for individuals to get their points across with as little interference as possible.

To inform the development of the interview schedule, I conducted a Focus group (Yin, 2003) to try out the questions I had drafted in order to get feedback and consider any changes that might need to be made. The focus group took place at a local Community Centre, with a group of learners in a literacy class. The individuals who attended were all asked by their tutor if they would be prepared to participate and she explained what was going to happen. I also went through the process with the group and we had an informal discussion using the main questions from the draft questionnaire under each of the sections outlined above. The information from the group was used to inform the development of the final interview schedule and questions (Appendix 4). Rubin and Rubin (2005) see the interviewee as a 'conversational partner' and they consider that this 'has the advantage of emphasising the active role of the interviewee in

shaping the discussion and in guiding the paths the research should take' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Focus groups

Once I had developed the initial interview schedule, I wanted to try out the questions to make sure that they were firstly, understandable and secondly, that they were able to encourage individuals to share their experiences. Focus groups are particularly useful early on in the research process to inform other methods which may come later. Both Kreuger and Cassey (2000) and Robson (2002) suggest that focus groups can be used very effectively in the early stages of the development of a study. I used the Focus Group to inform firstly, the development and secondly, the refinement of the questions for the semi-structured interviews. I used the interview questions with a group of learners and discussed the draft questions. I wanted to make sure that the language I used was clear and consistent and gave appropriate explanations where necessary, avoiding the use of acronyms and jargon in favour of plain English. Equally, however it was important to avoid taking an overly simplistic or patronising approach. During my background discussions with the participants and their course tutors, it was clear that many of the participants had developed a range of very effective strategies to enable them to manage with their literacy issues as adults. It was important to ensure that individuals were given every opportunity to participate in the process of the focus group and to feedback when they wished to (Robson, 2002).

Feedback from the focus group and from the early interviews made it possible to further develop the interview questions, and in some cases to avoid particular problems which might have arisen about understanding and perspective. One example from early on in the focus group was with assumptions that I had made about using terms with which I was familiar and thinking that they would be equally familiar to the interviewees. In the first focus group session, I asked each individual how long they had been attending their literacy class. No one seemed able to answer the question and as I went round one

by one, there was an increasing silence and several confused looks. I was about to move on to the next question, when one of the participants said, 'what's this literacy then?' The tutor then realised what the problem was and explained that the class was known at the Centre as English for Adults! Once this was cleared up, all the participants were able to answer the question and I was able to update my question to ensure that in future I didn't make assumptions about either the title of the course or that everyone uses the same terminology as I do.

Based on my research questions, and the schedule, I knew the general areas of interest and used these initial questions to start the interview off. However, as each individual interview progressed, it developed its own direction and and pace with some taking longer than others and in some cases not covering as much ground but exploring fewer areas in much more detail. I tried to influence the specifics of the interview as little as possible, concentrating on maintaining the overall direction and ensuring that the three research questions were covered. I have included an example of part of an interview schedule with written annotations in Appendix 8.

Semi-structured interviews

At the core of the research were the semi-structured interviews I conducted. According to Kvale (1996), the virtue of semi-structured interviews is their openness without dependence on standardised techniques and complex instructions for how they should be carried out. I was convinced that it was important that the interviews gave the participants as much opportunity as possible to describe things as they wanted to, to tell me about their experiences in their own way with a minimum of prompting. In order to achieve this, I wanted to make the interview process as informal as possible. Kvale (1996) asserts that a semi-structured interview can 'uncover their [the participants'] lived world', and as such, make it possible to access depth, detail and richness (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) that cannot be obtained through more quantitative methods such as surveys and

questionnaires. In making the choice to use semi-structured interviews with learners, it was necessary to develop clear, appropriate but flexible interview questions and this included eliminating jargon and stating the questions as clearly as possible.

Participants in the study

Once I had obtained permission from the senior management of the particular organisation (Appendix 3a), I met with the class tutor to discuss the research and explain what I was aiming to do. I asked the tutors to discuss the proposal with their groups, to explain that I wanted to carry out one to one interviews and to get the consent of the group to my attending their class. I also asked the tutor to ask the individuals if they would be prepared to be interviewed and what that would involve. I was able to chose participants from the list of names of all those in the class who said they were happy to be interviewed.

In deciding which individuals to invite to take part in the study, I took what I felt was a random approach to selection by asking a colleague to choose the names at random from a list I had prepared. The only limiting criteria that I used was to check that each of the potential participants were in the category of 'hard to reach' learners according to the LSCs definition of not having taken part in formal learning for at least three years. All of the learners were eligible in this regard so all were included on the list to be selected. By selecting the sample in this way, I was attempting to be as random as possible in my sampling. However, there was inevitably some bias in the process. Firstly, because I had selected the particular courses from a much larger list of provision and I had also discussed with the tutor beforehand whether or not they would be keen for their group to be included in the study. If the tutor had not felt comfortable with their group's potential responses to me, they would have been able to 'self select' out of the process in the beginning. However, there are necessarily limitations when carrying out unofficial research, in that I didn't have any official status and while I had the permission of the heads of the institutions to carry out the study, I did not want to do so

over the head of the tutor so potentially, this was a source of bias in the study.

There were five provider sites in the plan with 49 individual learners (Appendix 1). I chose to interview three individuals from each group class plus the two individuals who were having one to one sessions at their employer. This meant that I conducted initial interviews with fourteen individuals (Appendix 5). I conducted a second interview with five of the fourteen participants, making a total of nineteen interviews in all. The second interviews were held particularly with those individuals that I spoke to earlier on in the study, and were carried out to ask supplementary questions that arose out of the early analysis that I did, and to get clarity on some of the issues they raised and experiences they described. I found that as I progressed with the study, my questions became more focused and I was more practiced at ensuring that all areas were covered during the first interview with an individual. One factor that I had not anticipated was that in most cases the individuals who took part were extremely keen to talk to me and they were wonderfully frank and insightful in relating their, sometimes very personal and difficult, stories. I ended up with many hours of tapes and pages of transcripts, which represents a richness of data that I cannot do justice to in one research project.

Below is a summary of the individuals who took part in the research. I have included more detail and some general biographical detail about participants in Appendix 5. I agreed, as part of the research undertaking (Appendix 3b) to make sure that participants' real names and any data which might make specific identification of individuals, delivery sites or providers possible would be omitted to maintain confidentiality. The overall gender, age and employment status balance is accurate. Real names are not used, however I chose to refer to individuals by nicknames rather than using letters or numbers, as I wanted to preserve the sense of individual identity rather than simply being part of a sample.

Delivery site	Nickname	Age
Women's Shelter	Lily	20
	Jane	24
	Claire	19
Local college site	Paul	42
	Moira	53
	Roy	31
One to one at employer	Adam	43
	Jim	50
Local pub	Helen	48
	Brenda	27
	Alice	39
Community centre	Dan	47
	Chloe	22
	Sue	63

Figure 2: Summary table - participants' identifying name, age and study site

Each of the interviews was recorded, with the permission of the individual, so that I was able to concentrate on asking the questions, listening to the responses and asking follow up questions as the interview progressed. All of the interviews were transcribed word for word and then these transcripts were analysed. Chapter four explains that analysis in more detail. During the interviews, in the same way as I did with the focus groups, I had to reflect quite closely on the wording and context of the questions I was asking in order to make sure that we had a 'shared understanding developing' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) between myself and the interviewee. This was important in the analysis of what the individuals were saying, ensuring that my interpretation of the meaning of what was being said had a good chance of being the same as that of the interviewee. In some cases, in order to check this understanding, I repeated to the interviewee what I thought they were saying and asked if that was

what they had meant. I have included several excerpts from interview transcripts in Appendices 7a, 7b and 9).

An example of this, was the use of the word 'chinwag' which one interviewee used to describe what happens in the back of classrooms at school,

> '.....you can have a chinwag but still carry on with your work!'

and which was one of the positive things, that she identified about the literacy course she was taking part in. At first I did not understand what she meant by 'chinwag', until I mentioned it to a colleague who explained that 'chinwag' meant gossip or chatting! I clarified my understanding of the meaning with the individual during her second interview. This was important since my understanding of this was crucial to a proper appreciation of what she was saying to me. Rubin and Rubin (2005) consider that learning what is important to those being studied is crucial to a successful interview process, and by paying attention to these details I was able to do a better job of the analysis. As the process continued, I adapted and reinforced the question elements to make sure that I was able to follow up and improve my understanding as well as to check out some of the emerging themes from the analysis.

Credibility and trustworthiness

Using a qualitative approach to the research which focused on individual descriptions of past and present experiences of formal learning activity and how these experiences impacted on individual views about formal learning, raised questions about the potential credibility and trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis process. The outcomes would be based on descriptions of experiences which were unique to each individual. Using a flexible, semi-structured approach to the questions meant that while each interview had a similar format, they could not be said to have been identical or reproducible. Would research findings, based for the

most part on narrated personal experiences, be applicable to the broader arena of research into policy development? Bassey (1999) asserts that while it is not possible to make specific scientific or statistical generalisations from qualitative data, it is possible to put forward interpretations about what has been observed. Bassey (1999) refers to these as 'fuzzy generalisations' defining them as 'predictions' which carry possibility but no certainty. I was aware that by concentrating on a relatively few, in-depth interviews I might be limiting the broader reach of any conclusions, but that this would be counterbalanced by better insights into individual experience.

At the same time, however, it has been important to focus my analysis on what is actually being described by individuals and allow the themes to emerge through these descriptions. To maintain this 'uniqueness', I did not attempt to include the emerging concepts[7] under the categories used by the other studies. Where possible, I used terms that individuals had used in their narrative, grouping individual concepts together into broader themes as they emerged. My aim was to identify key themes in the particular experiences of individuals and I was careful to bear this in mind as the analysis went forward. The broader imperative of the research was to listen carefully to what individuals had to say and remain open to cues about the impact of experience in participant's narrative.

In order to achieve this, I would need to base my approach to the study on an essentially interpretive premise and ensure that these narrated experiences were the foundation on which the research would build. I was able to refine this thinking further through developing my research questions, originally very quantitative in focus, but which began to evolve during the earlier phases of the study to reflect my determination that it would be the experience of learners which would lead and shape the process of data collection and analysis. It was important to develop research questions which focused the study and directed...

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[7] 'concept' is a term used in Strauss and Corbin (1998: p 102 - 103) as part of the Open Coding process and represent the 'building blocks of theory'

'...the looking and thinking enough but not too much'
(Stake,1995).

Bassey (1999) highlights a number of key stages in the development of a study plan, considering that while research is essentially creative in nature, it is nevertheless 'a systematic activity' (Bassey, 1999). As an alternative approach to the positivist focus on reliability and validity of research, Arksey and Knight (1999) consider that qualitative researchers can rather look at terms such as consistency, trustworthiness and authenticity as ways in which to assess the contribution made by a particular study. In doing so, the researcher must pay close attention to the design of the study in general and to the specific elements such as choice of questions for interviews and focus groups. Collecting sufficient volumes of data as well as ensuring that a range of views are included is also vital in making sure that significant features of the studies are explored.

One way of increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research was through triangulation using multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2003) describes this as one of the great strengths of case studies. The combination of different sites and a variety of methods adds greatly to the depth and breadth of understanding of the data. This blending and balancing of the strengths and weaknesses of multiple methods can enhance the confirmation and completeness of case studies (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Careful use of this type of triangulation supports the study and contributes to a more reliable analysis and interpretation of the data. Due to time constraints, I did not use a range of different methods for the reasons previously explained but using a range of delivery sites and types of provision increased the range of data that was available. The similarity between the themes which emerged from each of the interviews was striking. There was further evidence of consistency when comparing these emerging themes to the findings of Barton et al (2006) and McGivney (2001) in that there were considerable

similarities between what they described and the themes identified in my study.

Ethical considerations

The research process involved three main groups of participants. Firstly, those individuals who took part in the actual interviews and focus groups. Secondly, the class tutors and the providers they represented and then thirdly, myself as the researcher. All three had a potential impact on the way in which the research was carried out and therefore all three needed to be considered in the development of the study and in the ethical implications of the work that was done.

Firstly, in considering the individual participants, I identified several elements that had to be born in mind. One was the potential vulnerability of the participants. It was important to consider the situation for participants with limited literacy when I was preparing written and verbal material. I was careful to always to consider the balance between written and verbal explanations and ensuring that participants had a clear understanding of any written items. Of particular concern here, was making sure that participants were able to give informed consent (Arksey and Knight, 1999) to taking part and that they had opportunities to share any concerns they might have prior to agreeing to take part. It was vital to make every effort to explain clearly to the participants what the purpose of the research was; why they were being asked to take part; to explain what their contribution was going to be used for and how they would be able to feedback into the process if they should wish to. It was important that participants were clear about my role as researcher and the extent of that role within my developing relationship with the interviewees (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

I dealt with this in two ways. Firstly by discussing the wording of questions with tutors to identify potentially complex words or concepts prior to discussions with the learners and secondly, by asking the tutor to explain to the group and to give them the

opportunity to ask questions without my being there as well as giving them another opportunity just prior to the start of the interview. For the focus group, I decided to get verbal rather than written consent from the learners as the tutor felt that the group members would find written documents intimidating, whereas by giving them opportunities to ask questions and talk about what would happen, they were able to feel much more comfortable. I was also keen to make sure that those who took part were able to have an opportunity to discuss what had happened and to be kept up to date on the progress of the work. I have been back to each of the groups to report my progress and will continue to visit those groups that are still in existence. I have also offered to make the work available for individuals to read should they wish to!

The second significant group were those providers and tutors who were delivering the classes. While the concerns here were different, it was important to address them. My first approach was to discuss the study proposal with the appropriate senior person within the organization to get their permission. This was done in writing (Appendix 3a) as well as having a face to face discussion to explain what I intended and give them an opportunity to ask questions. As with the individual participants, I made it clear that the study would be anonymous and that apart from general references to an 'FE College' for example, the classes and providers would not be identified. All of the providers I approached were keen to take part. After the initial approach, I felt that it was important to involve them in the development work around the research. These were qualitative studies and were therefore characterised by development through dialogue and negotiation. Included in the research plan, was appropriate time for checking back and involvement of the organisation management in the progress of the work (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It was my intention to keep them up to date on the broad developments in the study as I did with the learners so that there were no 'big' surprises at the end of the work.

Obtaining permission and consent

I requested and obtained formal permission from the senior person within each of these sites, although informal agreement has already been reached based on our discussions. I talked to managers at each of the provider sites and to the class tutors about developing the individual case study plan. Based on my meetings with these colleagues, the initial plans included dates for the study; identifying which literacy class at each site. It was important to include the tutors as early as possible in the planning stage to ensure that they were happy with the approach being taken and to draw on their expertise and experience. The plan also included an outline of the specific methods that I would be using; focus groups and semi-structured interviews with learners and set out a timetable for each of these. As the study progressed and the scope was scaled down to focus on the interviews rather than other elements, I had further meetings with the tutors and providers to explain the changes and why I was making them.

With respect to my involvement in the study, an area of potential concern was my various roles within the research (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Firstly, those challenges relating to my role within the local LSC and the influence and impact that might have on tutors and participants. In my day to day LSC role, I work with a range of providers within Lincolnshire on widening participation in learning and understanding the needs of vulnerable adults in the context of development of local policy and the provision of learning opportunities. While I represent the 'establishment' in this context, I consider that I have developed effective relationships with providers over the years. However, it was important that to be aware of the effect that my other roles might have had on my role as researcher and that I was proactive in ensuring that the organisations and participants were as comfortable as possible about what was happening. One way I did this was to include the curriculum managers and tutors as well as the participants through focus

groups, in the development of the interview outlines and suggested questions. My aim was to minimise any concerns that they might have about possible bias on my part by allowing them to be part of the development process and to have an input into the questions and the way they were framed. I also spent time discussing the research proposals with managers and tutors to get their input on the overall design (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

There was a particular incident involving the comments of one of the class tutors when I was introduced to the group. The tutor introduced me by my first name and then added that I was the person who gave them the money for the class so they should be 'nice' to me! Clearly this had potential to influence the way in which the group and individuals responded to me and how they might potentially answer the questions I asked. I explained this to the tutor, and we were able to identify another class instead. When I was introduced to this group, the tutor told them my name, and what I wanted to do but NOT my relationship to the funding for the provision.

There was also the potential for an internal bias developing with respect to my personal and professional roles and the dilemma about reconciling what might be my personal views on the current state of adult learning policy and that of my professional role in its implementation. I had to continually ask myself if I was finding what I was hoping to find in the data? Would I be too harsh in my assessment of its implications for policy or would I be too lenient? Firstly, I had to accept that I have those views and that they would be part of the underlying consideration that I brought to the research and that this could lead to bias (Bassey, 1999). I couldn't take that away so I had to make sure that I didn't rely solely on my own interpretation of the data when reaching conclusions. I did this by interfering with the words of the interviewees as little as possible and by devoting a considerable portion of the data analysis to reproducing what the individuals had actually said and letting the descriptions of their experiences speak for themselves. I also used my theoretical framework as a point of reference to compare the

emerging themes against to see what the similarities or differences might be. In this way I hope I have been able to develop an element of analytical distance in the evaluation and conclusion. However, given the qualitative nature of the study, and my closeness to the subject matter, I have to accept that there is the potential for bias (Hammersley, Gomm and Woods, 1994).

Arksey and Knight (1999) point out the potential impact of previous experience and researcher background on the way in which interviews are carried out. This was obviously a factor to be considered in the content of the data that was collected. It had implications for establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected and was also likely to have an impact on the perceptions of the interviewee as well. What Kvale (1996) refers to as the craftsmanship and credibility of the researcher might have a considerable impact on the process. I did have experience of conducting interviews as well as focus groups although it is not as part of my current role. One of the things I did to try to minimise this impact was to discuss the questions and the process with other colleagues who had previously conducted research of this kind. I discussed my overall approach, initial questions and also the results of the early interviews to get feedback as to how I might improve and develop the process.

This chapter has considered how the research plan was developed from the research questions and theory in the literature review. It has identified the type of methodology which best supports the aims of the research. The planning and development of the specific methods have been described, explaining how the study has changed and developed over time. It outlines some of the problems encountered in the collection of the data and how these were addressed. The chapter also covered the concern for credibility and trustworthiness and focussed on some of the ethical issues which have emerged and the strategies for dealing with these. The next chapter describes the approach to the analysis phase of the research.

Chapter 4: Data analysis

Chapter four outlines the approach taken to the analysis of the transcript data. Section one reviews the qualitative premise of the research, identifying the main concerns for carrying out the analysis and considering the background to the decision to use a grounded theory approach. Section two describes the analysis method and gives an illustration using an extract from one of the interview transcripts. Section three identifies some of the specific concepts which emerged from the process using examples from the data to illustrate these. Finally, there is a summary of the main points linking to the in-depth analysis described in Chapter five and six under each of the two research questions.

An approach to the analysis of qualitative data

Layder (1993) states that

> 'research which begins from an accredited explanatory framework such as Marxism, functionalism, developmentalism or another, and then proceeds to 'explain' empirical evidence in its terms, simply works to reinforce the boundaries between frameworks'.

This was not an approach I wanted to take. I was convinced that if I was to derive my analysis from what I was hearing from the participants, I needed to find a way in which I could use the experiences of learners as they were described to me and let the content contribute to the theory in a pro-active rather than comparative way. The decision to use a qualitative approach to the data collection, meant that it was equally important that the methods I used were equally open to the influence of the data. Early on in the process, I attempted to find an approach to analysis which maintained the focus on individual experience and interpretation. I didn't want to evaluate the data based on a particular theory or set of

criteria. Rather, I wanted to find an approach which was as responsive to the data as possible. I didn't consider I was setting out to test a particular external hypothesis in the research, I was rather interested to see what emerged from the interviews themselves. This dilemma continued until I attended a seminar by Dr Chris Pole which challenged the notion of starting with an external hypothesis. He outlined an approach using grounded theory to identify concepts within the data which allowed possible theories to emerge from themes identified in the data. This was an approach that resonated with what I was trying to achieve and, after reading further (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Dey, 1993) I decided to use a grounded theory method in the analysis of my data. Potentially, there were concerns about using this approach in that it relies heavily on the experience of the researcher in conducting interviews. Miles and Huberman (1984) consider that this has the potential to introduce bias into the analysis. However, on reflection, I decided that in having made the choice to put the described experiences at the centre of the study, I had to approach the analysis in as flexible a way as possible and this would give me that flexibility. Using a grounded theory focus offered an option which developed concepts and themes from the data itself. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) see value in taking a variety of approaches to developing theory and consider that it is important to 'speculate about the data in order to have ideas.'

Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that interpretation through theories grounded in the data can facilitate insight and understanding which in turn can be significant in developing practical actions. This was important in what I wanted to get out of the research and as a result, grounded theory became the main influence in the way in which I approached the data analysis.

Data analysis

To begin the analysis, I transcribed the interview recordings in detail and added the notes that I had made during the interview about pauses, laughter and any non-verbal inputs I had observed. Since I was looking closely at the data and wanted to make sure that I

considered all aspects of the input from the interviewees, I felt that including the non-verbal content was important and added depth to the transcript. Some excerpts from the interview transcripts have been included in Appendix 7 as an illustration. This was particularly useful in some interviews where the individual was quieter and less inclined to answer questions in detail. Smiles and other gestures often added emphasis when words were not used. Once the interview had been fully transcribed, I spent some considerable time reading through the data and listening to the tape of the interview. it is a process of reading, listening and reflecting which involves going in and out of the data. It was a time consuming process! As I became familiar with the transcripts, I then went through them in detail and made some initial notes about words or phrases that struck me as interesting or significant. I then read through these again, noting any potential concepts or themes that seem to be emerging (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Initially, I was sceptical that something as simple as reading through the data would lead to useful insights and I had to be particularly careful not to bring any presuppositions into my reading of the data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) caution that the researcher has to be aware that their own background can lead them to make incorrect assumptions about what interviewees are actually saying. There were times that I needed to revisit the tape and the transcript repeatedly so that I was sure that I had recorded the essence of what the participant was saying rather than what I assumed they would be saying. This painstaking analysis increased the time taken for the work considerably but has paid dividends in terms of clarity and my understanding of what was being said.

The main grounded theory method I used for this was microanalysis which involves carrying out a very detailed review of the transcript, looking at it line by line to identify what might be the initial categories. These initial categories are then combined with others having similar properties and dimensions into concepts which are the building blocks of emerging theories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This helped

to open up various interpretations of what was being said and facilitated making connections between seemingly unrelated statements. An example of this is the use of the phrase 'they kick us out', by one of the participants to describe the process of leaving school. At first reading, it seemed quite a harsh description of leaving school. I asked myself what other phrases could she have used to describe the process such as 'finished school', 'stopped going' or 'term ended' but instead she chose to use the phrase 'they kick us out'. It seemed to that this was perhaps indicative of the way in which this individual perceived the school's view of her value. It might also link into the potential theme of *choice* which recurs in other interviews as well.

Below is an excerpt from one of the microanalysis exercises I carried out on a transcript with my notes and comments included. It identifies possible concepts and themes, and notes items which I highlighted for further clarification.

Excerpt from transcript

Note: This section looks at issues about the differences between this course and K's experiences at school. This has been covered in earlier sections but some of her comments here shed more light on her view of school and suggests potential areas to be covered in the next interview with her.

Note: K's view of herself as well as of school?

Note: it is important to look at how this potential concept of **difference from school** is considered as part of the planning for the course by the tutor and the curriculum manager.....

Note: difference between school and adult classes?

D: you have done a lot of things, haven't you?

K: yeah (laughs) when I get on well I get on well.

D: can I ask, you did your GCSEs and you found you were pregnant. Do you think you would have left school anyway after your GCSEs?

Comment [P1]:
-Need to explore what she means by this.
-Also look at how this relates to course activity

K: well we have no choice. At S…. B…..School, when you've done your (doesn't finish sentence).....they kick us out just before the GCSEs and we just go back for the exams.

Note: the following looks at K's attitude to making choices. There are echoes here of comments from the B……. interviews where they talk about being **treated like adults** and how school didn't give them any respect. this is a potential key theme – is this repeated in other interviews?

Comment [P2]: Choice as an issue has cropped up several times and I will consider it as a concept going forward.

Comment [P3]: Specific form of words implies 'lack of respect'? Could have used other terms such as: *we finish school*; *our term finishes*; *we leave* but she uses quite a negative phrase. I would want to check this out with her at the next interview.

D: so you never thought about staying on and doing A'levels or anything like that? Note: Message from her that she wasn't good enough to stay on / go to other sixth form? How might she see this?

K: Nooo……I had a job lined up to go and work on a cruise ship so I was quite gutted when I found out I was pregnant.

(wanting to explore potential concepts related to **different from school / making choices / empowerment / being in control) how students see themselves differently as learners – about NOT being able to make choices**

D: well perhaps one day in the future? (in the next interviews I want to explore K's attitude to empowerment and being in control)

K: Naah, I cant see it. I'm about to get married so I've got to behave. (laughs)

Comment [P4]: Does K consider that she has choices? How does she link her actions to the choices that she makes? Is she a victim of circumstances or fatalist? Does this course provide her with more choice?

Comment [P5]: Did she have any choices about this.

Comment [P6]: Not possible to change mind, this is the way things are?

Comment [P7]: Attitude to marriage – what will be her punishment for bad behaviour ie: making a fun choice!

Comment [P8]: K links the job on the cruise ship with bad (could she possibly mean independent) behaviour? Does she see choice as out of reach / bad?

Comment [P9]: K refers to her marriage and actions in terms of good / bad behaviour. Does this link in to her views on choice? Could have said:
-So I don't want to go away
-I am happy as I am
-No desire to go anywhere or do anything else

Notes:This section has suggested several potential concepts;Different from school; Making choices; Empowerment

Being in control

These concepts may in time be combined into fewer categories but for the time being I will continue to use them separately.

There are also a couple of interesting phrases used which I want to follow up on when I next speak to K:

'kick us out'

'got to behave'

While very little of this section applies to the course she is currently doing, the value of it is that there are references to school which give a potential insight into how K views school. School and negatives experiences of it have been repeatedly brought out during other

interviews that I have done, however some of the comments that K makes unpack this issue of school a little more – how she was treated, her attitude to choices and her ability (her right) to make them etc.....this may have significance in affecting her opinion of the current course and how positive she feels it is – is one of the characteristics that makes this course 'better', that she is allowed choice and feels empowered? Early days yet but an interesting extract

Robson (2002) describes the reality of the analysis process as being very different from the traditional one-way model of research which involves collecting the data and then doing the analysis. He does believe, however that it is a common sense approach to finding out about something that is a puzzle. As I continued with the analysis, I felt increasingly comfortable with the approach and consider that some interesting concepts and themes have emerged from the data. My research was not one-way in that I did not simply conduct one interview with each of the participants, I reflected on the interview transcripts and went back to conduct a further interview where I had issues I wanted to clarify. I also adapted the questions according to the experiences being described and added further questions for clarity as necessary. This added to the complexity of the final analysis (Robson, 2002) but meant that the data obtained was more detailed

Some examples of concepts described in the interview transcripts

During the analysis of the interview transcripts, I identified a number of single concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) which seemed to have significance for individuals and how they thought about formal learning. During the initial analysis, a considerable number of these individual concepts were identified, with examples being identified in all of the narratives. This next section describes some of these.

As part of the process of understanding the concepts identified, I wanted to maintain as close a connection as possible to what the interviewee had actually said. In order to do this, I was keen to use terms from their narratives as labels for the concepts identified. I have therefore used actual quotations, in vivo labels (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) from the interviews as 'titles' for each of the examples. In this section, though, I have identified several individual concepts and considered what might be some of the significant emergent characteristics of these concepts in the context of the study. The phrases given in bold are the 'in vivo' labels given to the concepts

and are quoted directly from the interview transcripts. The associated comments are part of the initial microanalysis and are used in subsequent chapters as part of the development of broader themes under each of the research questions. I have included quotes from the interviews and they are given here to illustrate the analysis and give a sense of the kinds of comments that were made.

- **'They kick us out'** (feeling unwanted at school)

Participants often described the attitude of their school towards them as being barely tolerant, a feeling that they were not wanted because they didn't fit in. They felt that the school was active in wanting them to leave and that it couldn't happen too soon. In the majority of cases, individuals said that they had to leave and were not given the choice of staying on. The language used by participants to describe leaving school might could reflect their feeling of being unwanted there. Even the forms of words such as '*kick us out*'; '*glad to be rid of us*'; '*bugger off*' used in the descriptions seems to imply that individuals felt that they weren't respected by the school. Individuals said that they thought that the school and teachers didn't feel that they were worth the effort .

- **'Its not like school, all confused and that'** (not being able to cope at school)

This quote refers to a question about how an individual felt about their current course. However, all of the participants described situations at school where they felt that they were having difficulty being able to keep up with what was happening, whether in terms of getting the work done or simply understanding what was expected of them. This was often linked to descriptions of having a very chaotic, insecure and unpredictable family life, *'you never knew one day to the next', 'they was never there'*.. For many, their family arrangements were, and for some still are, constantly changing. This was also linked to experiences where individuals felt that they were falling further and further behind at school *'it didn't matter, I was still behind'*, and as a result had withdrawn from the effort or given up

completely, with truancy often being given as their answer to the problem, *'I used to hide round the corner'*.

This was also related by some of the interviewees to the difficulties created by their having undiagnosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia which had not been identified by the school. Individuals described having a sense of continuous struggle to cope and feelings of confusion, *'it weren't simple, I didn't understand half the time', 'it just baffled me'*. When asked how the school responded to this, individuals said that school didn't respond and that they got no help, *'they wasn't interested, didn't care probably.'* This lack of support was described by individuals who had been at school many years ago and by those who left school comparatively recently.

- **'You've no choice really, it just happens'** (lack of choice)

One of the concepts that emerged from all of the interviews was the experience of not being able to have any influence on the way in which things happened to them and around them, *'didn't ask us', 'no fucking choice, honestly', 'ask us, no way'*, particularly at school and often in their descriptions of family life. Individuals seemed reluctant to make choices for themselves and described outside influences, *'the welfare'*; *'his family'*; *'our social worker'*; *'the health visitor'*; *'the kids'*, as reasons why particular choices were forced on them and this extended into many of their adult lives. Individuals said they didn't feel able to make choices for themselves as adults and this seemed to be as a result of previous experiences where they weren't given any choice about what happened to them. For others, this was linked to their making an active decision which had gone wrong, *'wouldn't put myself through that again'*, *'not likely, not again'*, *'I'd feel stupid if I did'*, and not wanting to risk doing it wrong again. The view seemed to be that they weren't able to make successful choices. Participants where often unable to describe what they wanted to do in the future or articulate future plans, what Barton calls 'imagined futures'(Barton et al, 2006) and this seems to be related to issues which are associated with making choices. If you find it difficult to choose between one or more alternatives, it can be difficult to

imagine future possibilities for yourself so '*You just get through day by day*'.

Individuals also described situations where they felt that choices they had made for themselves were bad, naughty or rebellious, '*I don't do fitting in*', '*it always goes wrong if I do it*', '*I shouldn't be naughty but I sometimes do go out*'. Individuals 'blamed' others for decisions they had made as though they felt that they needed to justify their choice e.g. taking the train rather than the bus which in reality was more expensive but involved less walking with a pushchair, because the children were '*trainaholics*' and it was easier to give in and keep them happy.

There were other examples of where individuals made instinctive decisions rather than reasoned choices because, '*It just happens don't it*?'; '*that's how it is, you've no choice*'. In some these cases the choice made turned out to have difficult consequences, reinforcing the individual's view that they were not capable of making good choices or that they ought to have a fatalistic acceptance of whatever happens because there is nothing they can do about it. From an unplanned pregnancy which means that you have to leave school, '*it was my own fault, I got into trouble*'; the weather making a 'decision' to rain on the Funday you've volunteered for, '*of course, the weather decided to rain on us didn't it*?'; through to getting up in the morning, '*I don't do momings, they don't like me*', there were descriptions linked to acceptance of what comes, to things happening whether you like it or not, to having no control or choice, to taking what is given and making the best of it, to putting up with it, to living with it.

- **'You had to be in, if you know what I mean?'** (not fitting in)

Individuals described the system, usually school, as being designed to support those who fitted in, '*you was fine if your face fitted*'. There was a sense that if you co-operated with the system then you would be rewarded. However, the majority of participants found it difficult to fit in with the system because they were not able to function as part of it, '*what chance did I have, none*', *you was always trying to catch*

up, no chance mate'. To a significant extent, individuals saw school as being a closed shop supporting those who co-operated with it and ignoring those who wouldn't. But how do you co-operate if you don't understand or can't do the work?

All participants referred to those who got on well. They described them as '*the popular lot*'; the '*clever clogs kids'*, who were always able to influence what happened in class and at school. They were often described as being '*favourites*' or '*teachers pet'* and often with a sense of envy, '*If you got in with them then you was alright, yunno'*.

For several participants this aspect was linked closely to the issue of whether or not you conformed and obeyed the rules, '*give them what they wanted'*. They were unanimous in believing that conforming to the rules brought rewards, mostly because they had observed the benefits accruing to the brighter children who were able to fit in, '*the favourites always got picked, didn't they*'; '*I never bothered putting my hand up, it was always one of them'*. Some participants observed that rules were strictly enforced for some (usually themselves) where for others there was a more relaxed attitude. If you were '*good*' then you got more lenient treatment.

- **'What was it like? Cruel I think....'** (being bullied)

All of the individuals I interviewed described being bullied at school and said that their school life had been difficult, '*I hated it, it was horrible*'; '*it went on and on, every day I was scared*', '*I was bullied*'. Their descriptions of school, particularly secondary school, were negative and often characterised by descriptions of fear, anxiety and having no one to help them, '*you couldn't stop it, who could you tell?*'; '*I used to hide round the corner, but you had to go out in the end*'. In many cases the bullying was by peers and in some instances by teachers/staff and often combined with abuse at home. The memories described were seen as difficult, '*terrible, very bad*'. Often bullying as an issue was raised through descriptions of actions taken to avoid it such as descriptions of truancy '*you stayed away when you could*'; being in a gang for protection '*we could get them back for*

it'; leaving school as soon as possible or actually dropping out '*I got out as soon as I* could'. The impact was often reflected in a deep distrust of relationships with new people in formal situations. *'I've never forgotten even after all this time'.*

- **'You don't say nothing, but with new people, you watch out'** (lack of trust in others)

As a result of being bullied in the past, individuals described the need to make sure you were careful with new people, developing a defence mechanism as a result of circumstances and experiences, '*you never know do you with new people?*', '*I don't let my guard down until I'm sure*'. They were almost all worried about what others might do, think or say in new situations. Individuals described having to learn to be careful, '*you should watch out*', guarded about who you trust, '*if you don't know someone, you don't know'*, and that everyone could be a potential antagonist, '*you've got to weigh it up, see who's there first*'. This response seems to have its origins in the bullying experienced at school. Many aspects of the narratives have been difficult to hear but in some ways, coming to understand the deep unhappiness that many of the participants experienced as children was the most profound. It is clear that for these individuals at least, the reach of negative school experiences is very long and has had a lasting impact on their lives, '*even now when I see that woman, I can still remember'; 'it made my life a misery, I'll never forget'; 'they should have done something, they just let it carry on day after day after day, I think it ruined my life.'*

- **'So you stopped asking in the end'** (poor relationships with teachers)

Relationships with teachers and other staff in authority were described as distant, uninterested and often antagonistic. Individuals considered that teachers often showed favouritism to the brighter children and did not find time to listen to them. They felt that teachers often regarded asking for help or asking questions as time wasting or troublemaking, '*she said, oh no not you again, just sit down'.* Individuals said that they were often segregated and

sometimes ridiculed in front of the class for being stupid and asking questions, *'he tells the class to listen carefully cos he knows I'll get it wrong'*. This resulted in being reluctant to take part. Individuals described feeling that they were disliked by the teacher and were not given a chance in class, *'he asks the question then looks at me and says, not you XXXX, put your hand down'*.

The message that individuals described were – *'don't try or you'll stand out and look stupid'*, *'rather back off'*, *'take the easy option and keep in the background'*.

- **'Anything's better than that'** (current learning experience is good)

Some individuals considered that school was so bad that anything that was not like school in terms of formal learning would be an improvement. In many cases, individuals were very non-critical of their current course, and tended to accept what was on offer because they felt that it didn't have *'a classroom feel to it'*; *'its not like school'* ; and *'it's a more safer, friendly environment'*, whereas individuals described school as a place that was neither safe nor friendly. However, despite their negative experiences at school, there was evidence that individuals had a view that learning is important with many references to *'bettering yourself'*, *'needing qualifications if you are going for promotion'* and *'doing better for the kids' sake'*. They referred to others who did well at school getting on better in life and wanting to make progress as well.

- **'I want to be better for my boys'** (want to support own children)

Individuals talked about wanting to be able to support their children as they go through school and having that parental responsibility, *'having them makes a difference to what you want'* ; *'you've got something to work for, I suppose'*. Wanting to read to children was often given as a reason to do the literacy course or not wanting to embarrass their children by not being able to keep up with them, *'how bad do you feel when you can't even read their reports and stuff?'*, *'I wanted them to be proud of something I'd done'*.

An individual's own experience of school and wanting to make sure it isn't the same for their own children came through strongly, '*I'll make damn sure they don't get bullied*', *'I told the school, I went up there and saw the teacher'*. Often they described a clear image of what good parenting should be, through what they would have liked to see or experience from their own parents or not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the past. In some cases the learners mentioned specifically that they did not want to be like their own parents in not being able to read or write, '*I didn't want to be like our Dad, everyone thought he was thick, I don't want to be like that*'.

Individuals said that it was too late to complain about what had happened to them but that they wanted to make sure that their children had a better experience than they did. They also felt positive about the formal learning activity they were enrolled on. Some participants described how they were actively encouraging other adults that they knew to enrol on a course because '*things are much better nowadays, they listen and stuff*'. Several individuals described their current course as being '*much better than school'* because they were able to express their views and feelings rather than bottle them up, '*you can say what you want to say*', *'it doesn't matter if you get it wrong cos she helps you understand'*. They felt able to talk about issues more, to the tutor and to the group, and that the course was more responsive to their specific needs.

Relationships with teachers seem to have been crucial in the way in which they viewed school. The relationships described seem for the most part to have been short lived or fragmented at best and completely lacking or destructive at worst. Without the support of teachers, school, particularly secondary school seems to have been a lonely and difficult place for almost all of the participants in the study. Their current experiences with tutors were much more supportive, and described in positive terms, '*she knows all our stories*', '*she cares about what happens, that's the really good part of it*'.

- **'It makes me sad to think about it'** (experiences at school last a lifetime)

One surprising response was that participants didn't seem to feel any overt anger at what they described as '*unfair*', '*unjust*' and '*mean*' treatment. Individuals talked about '*accepting the past*' and feeling that '*what's done is done, and can't be changed*'. Yet it was clear that their experiences had a profound effect on their lives and that for some, the scarring was very deep. One individual was in tears as she was describing how she felt about the things she had experienced at school even though it was 33 years later,

> *'you can't explain it, its with you like, she's rubbish, that's what they used to say, they didn't have the right, did they? They shouldn't have done it, I've lived with it for all these years. It's often made me cry, sorry.....I'm not rubbish, they shouldn't have done it.'*

The descriptions given by participants suggested that there were potentially a range of personal factors similar to those described by McGivney, (2001) and which also related to the research done by Barton et al (2006). There were certainly similarities between experiences described in the interviews and the idea of personal factors or barriers identified by McGivney (2001) and the 'commonalities' identified by Barton et al (2006). While this could not be considered as being evidence of direct reproducibility in terms of the research, it did go some way to supporting the credibility of the analysis (Bassey, 1999).

This chapter has considered the approach to the data analysis and described the methods used. The process was illustrated using an extract from one of the interview transcripts and the results of the initial microanalysis were given in more detail. Some of the single concepts identified were then compared with the theoretical framework elements to establish the potential for broader applicability of the initial findings in the context of local policy and to give an early

indicator of the credibility and trustworthiness of the data I was collecting. The next two chapters continues the data analysis phase in more detail, considering each of the research questions in turn.

Chapter 5: Research question one – data analysis

Do an individual's descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning indicate that there are 'personal' factors which may influence their further choices about engaging in formal learning?

Rogers (2002) considers that an individual's attitude to, and subsequent choices about formal learning are closely linked to an interplay between the individual and their experiences. In order to explore this and any implications for policy implementation at a local level, research question one focuses on individual descriptions of past formal learning experiences to understand any potential influence on 'personal' factors (McGivney, 2001) which might influence an individual's attitude to formal learning. McGivney (2001) believes that adults have a range of reasons why they do and don't participate in formal learning and classifies these as policy factors; institutional factors and personal factors. According to McGivney (2001) relatively little attention has been paid to the interaction between policy and these personal aspects of an individual's experience of formal learning. Griggs et al (2007) similarily highlight the crucial influence that experience can have on the impact of policy, considering that not enough research has been carried out in this area. This research question uses these descriptions of past experiences of formal learning to identify elements in the narrative which might indicate how an individual's attitude to formal learning had been influenced. This would then be explored further through the subsequent research questions, identifying any practical implications for implementation of policy at a local level.

All of the individuals who took part in the study were able to give vivid accounts of their past formal learning experiences. The personal impact of these experiences was, and for some of the individuals interviewed, continued to be, a significant influence on their attitudes to formal learning. For some, the experiences they described had taken place many years ago, whereas for others, it was a shorter period of time but in each case the impact had been significant for

them. Barton et al (2006) emphasises the significance and importance of understanding the role of personal experience in the choices individuals make about formal learning and that this should be crucial in developing appropriate learning opportunities which encourage individuals to take part. However, while current policy development accepts the need to take into account individual circumstances, there is a potential lack of cohesiveness across existing policy and practice which Leader (2003) believes does not manifest this in the area of lifelong learning, particularly with the increasing focus on skills. Bagnall (2000) considers that policy changes in provision and opportunity are increasingly determined by the economics of cost-benefit policies.

This chapter will focus on participants' descriptions of their previous experiences of formal learning to explore any significance these may have had in influencing the individual's choices with respect to formal learning, and its impact for local policy implementation. It identifies several potential personal factors (McGivney, 2001) which have impacted on the participants' views about formal learning (Barton et al, 2006) and for each of these, considers how these personal factors might influence the choices individuals make about engaging in formal learning.

Field (2006) considers that an individual's earlier, negative experiences of learning can mean that they find learning an unpleasant and stressful experience. This is particularly so "if elements of the learning environment recalled people's previous negative experiences of education or authority, or other traumatic or painful events from their histories" (Barton et al, 2007). In describing their past formal learning, participants in the study recounted details of a range of similar experiences which I have brought together here. While the study was carried out in 2003/2004, the findings clearly reflect what Field (2009) and Barton et al (2007) are saying about the impact of negative experiences, and that for these individuals, the positive benefits of learning can be overshadowed if the new learning

experiences do not take into account the particular needs of individuals.

1. Distrust of formal learning and its' institutions

All of the participants in the study described themselves as having been bullied. Their experiences ranged from low level teasing in class as a result of specific circumstances such as not being able to answer a question correctly,

> 'you try and answer the questions, but it makes you look stupid and they all laugh.' (Claire, 19)

through to sustained, intense and ongoing episodes of physical and emotional abuse which took place during the school day and which often continued outside of school.

> 'at school, and outside, I nearly got strangled on the bus one night coming home' (Helen, 48).

While the range and intensity of experiences varied from individual to individual, all participants were able to remember vividly how it was for them and how it had made them feel. The bullying was attributed most often to the individual's peer group or to older children in some cases. However, there were experiences described where teachers and other school staff were considered to have been responsible.

> 'the teacher looking at me like you're doing this wrong, saying why are you doing it wrong? Are you silly or stupid? Then they would all start, the class yunno' (Jane, 24).

Participants tended to regard all formal learning as putting them in a position where they will experience situations which create anxiety and embarrassment. Many of the participants had difficulty in remembering specific details about their school life such as when they started secondary school, how many years they had been at school or, in some cases, their age when they had left school.

However all participants where able to clearly remember their experiences of being bullied, in many cases a considerable number of years after the events had taken place.

> 'I've never forgotten even after all this time' (Sue, 63).

All felt that their experiences of bullying had had an effect on their ability to cope and progress at school and that it had influenced how they felt about learning once they had left school. A Kidscape Survey (Elliot and Kilpatrick, 1999) which looked into the long term effects of bullying found that individuals described their feelings at the time as depressed, scared, vulnerable but also angry and frustrated. In their survey, individuals also expressed their reluctance to put themselves in the same position again. Participants in this study had similar views.

> 'I was scared most of the time, and I believed I was stupid. If you're told something often enough and everyone says it, you sort of believe it don't you? It stays there, inside like. You get out of it as soon as you can, don't you? You don't want to go back again' (Chloe, 22)

> 'I left school because I was having problems with bullies and everything, so one day I thought, I don't like this and I'm not going to take it anymore so I walked out and haven't never been back, or done anything 'til now.' (Brenda, 27)

One major impact seems to have been on their attitude to relationships with others in authority and those in official positions. Participants described being sceptical about dealing with official organisations and felt that they should keep their dealings with officialdom as brief as possible, even extending to a view about borrowing books from the library.

> 'They don't help you much (describing attitude of benefits advisors), you can tell they think – oh this one's thick – and they

look down at you. They shouldn't be allowed to do that.' (Alice, 39)

'They're stuck up, looking down on you. You couldn't tell them about it (not being able to read), no point in going to a library, it is just like being at school.' (Chloe, 22)

Negative perceptions were particularly acute where institutions associated with learning such as Further Education colleges were concerned, with most individuals stating that they would not be prepared to attend a course if it was held at a college.

> 'never, I wouldn't go there, they wouldn't help like school didn't, anyway its for kids as well.' (Brenda, 27)

This distrust of formal learning and its institutions proves a consistent difficulty in engaging adults back into learning, particularly for colleges and other 'establishment' sites. Where individuals have had negative experiences, they are often reluctant to enroll at a college and prefer to choose to attend local classes based in their community. McGivney (1996) considers this unwillingness of non-traditional learners to engage with formal structures as a significant reason for ensuring that a locally focused and diverse delivery approach is maintained, and that learning opportunities need to be taken to where people are by ensuring that there is the possibility of local influence on the delivery of learning. The focus of current adult skills policy is on creating a demand-led system which meets the needs of individuals and employers (BIS, 2009). However, the envisaged delivery system delivering choice to individuals through Skills Accounts (BIS, 2009), will be contracted through regional centres of the Skills Funding Agency and will not offer provision at a broad range of different types of locally based provider but will rather focus delivery through fewer and bigger contracts.

2. **Distrust of new experiences and of putting themselves in a position where they have to deal with new people or take in new information.**

This was described particularly where individuals felt they had been ridiculed and embarrassed because they had not been able to answer a question put to them or had attempted to answer a question and got it wrong.

> ' I was called thick and stupid, had me head flushed in the toilet, all sorts of stuff. Even by the teachers who said I was stupid and not worth it. So I would say I'll show them and put my hand up to answer a question.....then the teacher would say what have you got your hand up for, thicko, and then after a while you think sod it and give up. We was sent to a special school as we was thick, but we wasn't, was we? They didn't listen.' (Sue, 63)

Generally there was a high degree of distrust in strangers described by participants, as well as the need to be on your guard when entering new situations.

> 'Whether there's anybody new, anyone I've got to talk to, I don't really like to.' (Claire, 19)

> 'I don't know really, but just what the others would be like. What I was going to say. I wasn't sure how people would react. Just silly things really.....what they think and that.' (Jane, 24)

> 'I put up a front, from being bullied yunno, I'm really not (a confident person), I just put up a front especially when I'm nervous. I get nervous around new people. I don't like to look as unconfident as I am.' (Paul, 42)

This distrust was also associated with anxiety when encountering new situations or meeting new people (Elliot and Kilpatrick, 2001). All

of the individuals I interviewed from the local neighbourhood Access Centre class, said that they did so because they knew the people there locally and that they had dealt with them in other ways such as benefit advice, coffee mornings etc prior to taking the decision to enrol on a course.

> 'It's the place you know, you're used to it being there, like its familiar. When I walked in they weren't new faces so it was better.' (Sue, 63)

Individuals had very little experience of success or achievement which they could build on to give them confidence. When asked how they felt about the bullying now in adulthood, they said that they were not able to trust others, that they lacked confidence and disliked new situations. Referring to adults in similar circumstances, McGivney (1996) states that:

> "Because of such feelings, many people shun anything with the word 'education' attached. They feel intimidated by formal educational insitutions which are perceived as inappropriate for adults, while many think they are too old to learn and undervalue their existing experience, abilities and skills. Much of this is to do with earlier experiences and people's perception of where they 'fit' in the social structure."

3. **Low self-esteem.**

> 'I was picked on because I weren't as clever as they were and stuff, you don't forget, it sticks, it makes you feel awful, awful inside.' (Helen, 48)

> 'What was it like? Cruel I think...and it never went away' (Sue, 63)

For all of the individuals in the study, the effects of being bullied were far reaching in terms of their ability to navigate successfully through

the school system at the time and with respect to their ability to take up learning and achieve in the future.

> 'I'd keep my head down and not take part, I'd try and listen but I daren't speak up in case they laughed.' (Claire, 19)

> 'I mean it's embarrassing but I've had it all my life, trying to hide it, thinking I was thick, I've spent most of my life trying to hide it.' (Adam, 43).

Individuals described feeling that they were not valued or respected by the school and that this was manifested through a range of staff behaviour both in and out of the classroom. They said that school rules were often not explained and seemed to be arbitrary as well as being selectively applied – harshly to some and more leniently to others, which they felt showed favouritism.

> 'It was horrible, I felt like I didn't exist. It was awful, things like that. If there was any trouble I used to get the blame always even if it weren't me.' (Helen, 48)

> 'There was always the favourites, the better looking, the gobby ones. Not so much the clever ones, but the top gang. They didn't have hassles.' (Lily, 20)

In other research, low self-esteem has been associated with poor academic experiences and difficulties at school. Elliot and Kilpatrick (2001) assert that one of the most dramatic findings of the survey they carried out was that adults who were the victims of bullying reported significantly lower levels of self esteem than those who were not bullied. Elliot and Kilpatrick (1999) also highlighted lower levels of self esteem in individuals who had been bullied.

4. Being an outsider or different, that learning is not for them.

Individuals were unlikely to consider learning as an option beyond school. Barton et al (2006) identify this attitude of being different as one of the commonalities in the experience of individuals not engaged in learning. Rossiter (2007) considers that this contributes to that range of possible selves which individuals adopt, and which is linked to the experiences they have had. Through their interactions with the school, individuals came to perceive themselves as not fitting in, of being stupid or thick or a troublemaker. Individuals felt that they were labeled in this way.

> 'you know you don't fit.' (Brenda, 27)

> 'I was always in what was called the thick class, you knew you was thick in that class.' (Adam, 43)

> 'I used to play up and get told off, usually it weren't my fault, but they still picked on me.' (Chloe, 22)

This was reinforced with examples of individuals being described in particular ways by staff who had not even taught them but who still used the 'label'.

> 'I didn't know the teacher but she says to me, oh **you're** that troublemaker, aren't you. I was only asking a question.' (Paul, 42)

The main issues raised by participants with regard to their experiences in school and the classroom were often described in the context of their interaction with teachers. While bullying tended to be concentrated around their interaction with their peer group or older children, their negative experiences of classroom activity and their subsequent views on whether they were capable of learning anything were all focussed on how they were treated by their teachers. All of

the participants in the study described negative interactions with teachers, with only two positive descriptions being given of teachers who were liked.

One individual talked about a teacher who 'was good, nice to us like' (Brenda, 27), but who left the school after only a term, 'which was a pity but she went to the grammar school, I suppose' (Brenda, 27) and another described,

> 'Mr Bxxx, he taught us sums, he was good at explaining, he'd sit with you if you needed it but he was put up with the top class 'cos he was so good' (Paul, 42).

The majority of participants were able to describe an experience in the classroom where they had been told either to put their hand down or go and sit down when they had approached the teacher's desk to ask a question. All participants remembered situations where they felt that they were holding things up or getting in the way by asking questions.

> 'He said, really loudly, oh not you again, what now? And everyone at the front giggled and pointed as I went to sit down.' (Sue, 63)

Asking questions or seeking further explanations seems to have been equated with being difficult or causing trouble.

> ' He said that I was deliberately thinking of things to ask about, why couldn't I just get on with my work. Course, I couldn't 'cos I didn't understand and he wouldn't tell me!' (Jane, 24)

5. High levels of stress, fear and anxiety and significant personal risk.

Kidd (1978) asserts that adults have as many potential triggers for anxiety about learning as young people do. From the descriptions given, individuals were exposed to a range of those elements identified by Kidd (1978) such as threat of failure, embarrassment or the exposing of inadequacy, all of which are potentially triggers for stress, fear and anxiety, and all of which will have an impact on participants response to the idea of formal learning.

Several individuals said that keeping quiet and not asking questions was the path of least resistance in the classroom context and this was often associated with their preferred position in the classroom, usually at the back and in the corner if possible.

> 'settling down at the back of the class, and keeping quiet, not being noticed was the best way.' (Alice, 39).

Several individuals also described situations where their attempts to answer questions had, because they had got the answer wrong, resulted in teasing, embarrassment and ridicule, this left them feeling even more at a disadvantage and reluctant to repeat the experience again.

> ' she said I was silly and to stop asking stupid questions, everybody laughed and they teased me later.' (Helen, 48)

In consequence of their poor relationships with their teachers, individuals routinely described their time in the classroom in terms of hiding, trying not to be noticed and feeling 'thick and stupid' (Chloe, 22). All of the participants felt that they had fallen behind, that there was no way they could catch up, and as a result they had stopped trying and 'switched off mostly' (Moira, 53).

6. Not being able to cope

Participants described themselves as finding school confusing and that they felt they were not able to cope with the every day routine they encountered. They did not feel that they knew what was expected of them and often described feeling that they were struggling to keep up with the others.

> 'They asked me something and I couldn't understand what they wanted, so it was difficult and I had no confidence.' (Claire, 19)

> 'Most days I just didn't understand what they wanted me to do.' (Alice, 39)

Many of the participants also described their home lives as being difficult, with several examples of problematic relationships between family members which often impacted, directly or indirectly, on the individual's experiences at school. Their experiences at home often had a significant impact on the individual's school day.

> 'I had to look after her (mother) so I couldn't go out not even to school.' (Chloe, 22)

> 'there was no train fare so we couldn't come home so I would miss school, sometimes for a week or two.' (Brenda, 27)

Examples of having to look after other siblings and therefore having to stay away from school, which, once again, compounded the issue of falling behind and feeling at a disadvantage was another issue raised by some. Being unable to eat properly before coming to school with its implications for maintaining concentration was mentioned by several of the participants, which once again put the individual at a disadvantage.

> 'school milk was breakfast most days for us.' (Jim, 50)

Related to the above, but in some senses distinct from it, is the situation encountered by those individuals who had specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia. Several of the participants in the study explained that they had subsequently been diagnosed with dyslexia by the provider of their adult learning course, and all of these individuals have been able to access specific support. At school however, the difficulties they had coping with the work resulted in their being described as 'thick' (Adam, 43), 'not all there' (Helen, 48) and 'wilfully stupid' (Moira, 53). None of the participants reported being diagnosed with dyslexia through the actions of their school although some did say that teachers had made comments such as, 'there must be something wrong with you' (Dan, 47), and once again this spanned the age ranges of participants.

> 'I knew there was something wrong and I said but no one bothered coming near me once I was sent to the special school.' (Helen, 48)

> 'They didn't pick up the dyslexia at school no, only when I went to college they found it.' (Claire, 19)

Individuals described always expecting the worst of themselves and it was clear that for most, they had moved into a similar chaotic lifestyle as adults where being unable to cope and feeling inadequate were part of how they expected things to be for them.

> ' I suppose you expect it'll always be like this, how can it change, or that's what I thought.' (Sue, 63)

As well as reinforcing the views of formal learning already mentioned, individuals seemed not have a positive view of themselves and to be continually exposed to a view of themselves as being slow, stupid and/or difficult which seemed to reinforced as they found themselves less and less able to cope. Participants often used this as a way to categorise themselves as adults.

'things have happened, because of school I suppose, I'm aware of it, but I've never really thought about it or understood why. Its my life, that's all.' (Lily, 20)

7. **Lack of confidence in ability to make own decisions and choices.**

In their descriptions of how situations happened and what the outcomes were, participants often described events as just happening and that they were to a great extent not able to control or influence the course of events even those directly related to their own lives. Individuals considered that '*it just happens don't it*' (Chloe, 22) about a variety of issues ranging from the influence of the weather, '*our fun day', and' the weather decides to rain on us.*' (Lily, 20); when they had to leave school, '*the school kicks us out*' (Lily, 20); pregnancy, ' *the baby came along*' (Claire, 19); through to whether they got up in time, '*I don't do early mornings*.' (Brenda, 27)

Participants couldn't easily speculate about their future lives and the impact that learning might have on what could happen to them. Individuals were unable to express what Barton et al (2006) refers to as an imagined future. Although in some cases, individuals had begun to consider what they might choose to do next but this was very tentative even for those who had been on a course for some months and in some cases a couple of years. It was very difficult for individuals to project forward in this way:

'I can't see the future to be honest, it'll depend on what he does. If he goes I don't know how I'll survive to be honest. I would have to for the kids, I think, but I don't know what I would do.' (Jane, 24)

'In 5 years' time, hopefully working, but I don't really know. The kids will be in school so I could be working, and away from Dxxxx. Definitely somewhere different to this. But it will depend on him and how it goes.' (Brenda, 27)

Another issue here was that individuals did not consider themselves competent or capable of making important 'adult' decisions. They tended to allow others to decide or dictate what happened and this seemed to be repeated in other areas of their lives. It was often described as being easier to take what came rather than actively trying to influence events, knowing they would fail. This was reinforced by the view that no one was listening to what they had to say and that their views didn't matter.

Secondly, participants are not able to see themselves in a future scenario influenced by choices that they might make. They found it difficult to see a way of making a difference and changing the pattern of their lives. They tended to believe that the way things were now was the way things would always be and that they wouldn't be able to influence what happened in any significant way.

> 'You don't like it, but what can you do?' (Alice, 39)

Individuals described feeling that they had no real control about events in their lives and that what happened to them was unpredictable. The concept of having the ability to make choices and actively influence what happened at school was described as being directly related to what teachers thought about you and to a great extent whether you were considered bright or not.

> 'we were the thickies so we didn't get a choice.' (Adam, 43)

> 'the top girls used to decide what we did in the lesson, the teacher would ask them to choose, how fair is that?' (Jane, 24)

Participants gave examples of how they considered they had had no choice in making decisions about major issues in their lives at school, stating that choices were forced on them by those in charge or made for them by circumstances.

'you left at 16, couldn't do anything else.' (Alice, 39)

'she wanted to move in with her boyfriend so we had to change schools, we didn't want to but we had to.' (Lily, 20).

In many cases, where individuals described making choices for themselves, these often resulted in negative consequences which they took to reinforce the fact that they weren't able to make successful choices.

'Once with a project, I decided to go up and show it to the teacher without waiting for her to ask us to hand it in, she was fed up and told me to sit down 'cos she was busy, really nasty like, I don't think she ever asked us to give the project in so all the work was wasted.' (Jane, 24)

Since individuals didn't feel that they had the necessary 'intellectual' skills to make appropriate choices, they described making choices based on instinct or desire rather than thinking it through. This tended to lead to inappropriate or problematic choices which would then reinforce this negative view of themselves. Individuals described choices as being best made by others who '*know better*' (Moira, 53), or as being forced on them because others decided it should happen or as '*going wrong*' (Paul, 42) because that's what always happens when they tried to do something.

Participants did not appear to have a vision of what they would do in the future. They accepted the views and opinions of others about what would happen very readily without attempting to construct other options and choices for themselves. Major influences here were school, particularly the views of teachers and also their family context. Mistakes and major problems they had encountered were often described as being inevitable and was often used as an excuse for when things went wrong.

'you get used to making the wrong decisions after a while, you sort of expect it.' (Chloe, 22)

The consequence of this lack of ability to influence and make choices reinforced individual's feelings of not being in control and that it is better to let others decide for you.

'you can't stop it, it just happens.' (Chloe, 22)

This chapter used participants' descriptions of their past experiences of learning to try to identify any 'personal' factors which might influence their choices about whether or not to engage in formal learning as adults. It is worth noting here that there was a considerable amount of agreement between the participants, with individuals sharing similar views and reporting very similar experiences in their narratives. While it would have been expected that some views would be different, this would perhaps be more likely in a larger sample. Participants, although they were selected at random to take part in the study, were all participating in literacy classes of one type or another and described having similar experiences of formal learning. Other research (Elliot and Kilpatrick, 1999) highlights that being bullied is a significant risk factor for social exclusion and in this sample, all the participants reported bullying of one sort or another. I have only been able to report the narratives as they were told to me, and although surprising, the coherence of the participants expressed views was a fact. Section one considered the individual narratives and suggested that they have an influence, this is brought out in the interviews and the next stage of the analysis will be to look at how these themes compare with the individual's current experiences of formal learning. Chapter six seeks to establish how significant current experiences of formal learning activity have been in helping individuals to modify views about learning and what the implications might be for their decisions to stay on the course or take-up further learning in the future.

Chapter 6: Research question two - data analysis

How do individuals describe their current experiences of formal learning and what are the implications of this for the implementation of national Skills for Life policy at a local level?

Barton et al (2006) suggest that everyone has a particular combination of practices and identities which they bring to bear on a particular situation and that these are developed in the course of their experience, past and present. It is these present experiences of formal learning which are the focus of research question two. While individuals may bring a range of values and experiences with them into their learning activity, it is the degree of willingness to use these experiences that differs from individual to individual (McGivney, 2001). The impact of a particular policy is not limited to the broader intention of that policy, it is rather an interaction between intention and the personal situation of the individual concerned (Preece, 2001). There is a tendency for skills policy makers to consider that raising expectations is all that is needed to encourage individuals to participate and that if opportunities are made available they will be taken up. Preece (2001) believes that this ignores the complexity of issues for excluded people and doesn't take into account the influence of experience and personal factors which individuals bring with them into any formal learning situation.

The Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001) is the particular skills policy used in the study and four aspects of it were selected for the analysis in this section. The implementation of the national Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001) is currently the role of local Learning and Skills Councils working with other local stakeholders and providers. The role of the local LSC is to ensure that the national policy is carried out at local level and to develop implementation strategies that are linked to an allocation of local targets. There have also been considerable changes recently, in that prior to 2006, local LSCs had direct

responsibility for interpretation and application of specific policies and strategies for their local areas. However, since the restructuring of the Learning and Skills Council in 2006, a further layer of interpretation has been added by the introduction of regional structures with local LSCs needing to take account of further regional iterations of policy, targets and budget allocations (LSC, 2006). As the autonomy of local structures to shape the content and local delivery models for skills policies is reduced (Atkin and O'Grady, 2007), it is important that the effectiveness of a policy in a local context is evaluated to try to understand what the impact is on the experience of learners locally and that this is fed back consistently to inform further policy development (Hill, 2003)

A major feature of the development of adult learning policy from the mid 90's has been its' metamorphosis into an adult skills policy which focuses on the specific skills needs of business (Coffield, 2000). From the Learning Age (DfEE, 1999) to Leitch (HM Treasury, 2006), this change has been driven by the government through its national and regional structures, aimed at an increasing focus on acquisition of skills. As a result of this, the primary policy intention is funding delivery of skills in priority sectors (BIS, 2009). Policy intention allows less and less scope for local adaptability to meet the specific needs of individuals and communities, thus contradicting established neighbourhood agendas and creating the potential for an 'implementation gap' to develop (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Newman (2002) considers that increasingly centralized policy development puts local adaptability at risk. In terms of adult skills, amidst all of this change, it has been increasingly important for the local implementation of policy that we understand the experiences that individuals are having and that these are fed back in an effective way (Rogers, 2002). McGivney (2001) and Barton et al (2006) emphasise this need to consult individuals about the content of their learning and to get feedback from them to support further development. In practice, however, as skills policy becomes increasingly specific and targeted towards an ever smaller range of skills outputs, the scope for locally influencing policy implementation

diminishes. This means that local feedback on the impact of policy is also minimized (Hill, 2003) creating a potential gap between policy intention and policy consequences.

In chapter five, the first research question was concerned with identifying, through participants' past experiences of formal learning, any factors which might affect the way in which a policy would impact on an individual. This analysis identified a range of possible personal factors which could be said to have influenced the individuals' view of and subsequent choices about formal learning (McGivney, 2001; Barton et al, 2006). In considering that the impact of a particular policy on an individual will be shaped by the experiences they have had previously, the second stage of the analysis attempts to assess to what extent local strategies for implementation of policy are able to influence an individual's experience and thus support them in overcoming any barriers created through these personal factors (McGivney, 2001). Bochel et al (2007) question the ability of those who are directly affected by policy to have any influence on its development and they consider that most of those who experience the impact of policy are not represented the policy making process. Can implementation of policy at a local level make the difference and ensure that individual and community needs can be taken into account? The purpose of this aspect of the research is to establish if there are indications that local implementation can have an influence on policy impact. Once again the emphasis was on listening to participants' descriptions of formal learning but this time focusing on their current experiences. All of the participants in the study were enrolled on an LSC funded Literacy course at the time the research was carried out, and it was their experiences on these courses that were described and subsequently used in the analysis for the second research question.

The scope of adult skills policy is extensive, covering a range of funding streams and has many different policy elements and programmes, each of which has specifically developed guidance, which include mechanisms for local implementation. It was not

possible to cover all of these areas so in order to explore the impact of a skills policy on individuals in the study, I chose to focus on the government's Skills for Life policy and specifically, the impact of four particular policy requirements of the strategy (DfES, 2001, p. 20 - 24), extracts from which are set out below. These specific requirements were chosen out of 'Delivering Skills for Life' (DfES, 2001) as being those which were most likely to have a direct impact on the current learning experience of the individual. While there are many other aspects of the policy which would have an impact on the overall learning experience, e.g. Level 4 qualifications for tutors (DfES, 2001), I considered that these would have a more indirect effect and therefore would be less likely to be evident in an individual's descriptions of their learning. The four elements were:

1. That the format of courses should be structured to reflect the needs of the individual learner.
2. That learners have access to clear support and guidance so that individuals can understand what they need to do to progress.
3. That learners be supported to develop individual action plans and to establish short and long terms goals for their learning
4. That learners are able to access to a clear set of nationally recognised qualifications.

These four statements, among others, detailed in the strategy guidance (DfES, 2001) are intended to ensure that the Skills for Life policy is able to achieve its' wider goals of increasing the literacy and numeracy levels of 750,000 people. The analysis in this chapter uses the participants' descriptions of their current experiences in a literacy class alongside the personal factors identified in chapter five to try to understand the impact of these policy statements on the way in which the policy has been implemented locally (L&R LSC, 2001). The four were chosen as being those most likely to directly impact on the experience that individuals were having, rather than others which were more indirect such as tutors being qualified to level 4 in their specialist subject, which while important, were more indirect. While the professional qualifications are relevant, relationships and

approaches to teaching are more likely to directly impact on the experience of the learner (Ivanic & Tseng, 2005). For the analysis, statements one and four are considered separately but statements two and three have been combined as they refer to similar issues, with statement two emphasising support for the individual to progress and statement three being about a practical manifestation of this through the development of action plans.

1. The format of courses should reflect the needs of the learner

The analysis in chapter five identified the issue of 'making choices and decisions' as being a significant personal factor for many of the participants in the study. This issue of 'lack of choice' is considered by McGivney (2001) to be an important barrier to engaging individuals back into learning. In recounting their past experiences, individuals interviewed described themselves as feeling that they were not capable of or were not allowed to make choices for themselves in a formal learning context and that they often felt ignored as a result. It is, however, acknowledged in the Skills for Life policy (DfES, 2001) that giving choice is a key aspect of successful engagement in learning. More recently an LSC report on empowering adults to learn states that 'a significant minority (around one in five) of adults are more vulnerable in the process of making choices in learning, and require more intensive support (LSC, 2009). In implementing this policy at a local level, a major consideration was to ensure that there was a range of courses available, delivered through community based providers in neighbourhood centres as well as in the workplace and at colleges (L&R LSC, 2001). The aim was to give as wider choice as possible, which meant working with an extensive local network and funding provision through a number of local providers. Achieving this broad base of delivery required a high degree of local autonomy in making decisions (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) which was possible at this time because local LSCs' a able to work within a broad policy framework and adapt this through local strategies (L&R LSC, 2001) to support local needs.

In describing their current experiences of formal learning, individuals said that they felt that they were able to take part in the process of deciding what kind of course they could enroll on and also felt involved in decisions about what would take place on the course. This ability to have an input into determining how policy is implemented is seen by Griggs et al (2008) as crucial to implementing people based policies. Participants said they felt able to negotiate what happened with the tutor and other learners and therefore considered that they were being listened too.

> 'Lxxx lets us get more involved in planning how we want to do it. There's a course but we can decide about parts of it. You feel more part of it, don't you?' (Claire, 19)

> '.....real life, it's like real life, we do stuff what we've brung from home to work on. Not fancy like school work what you couldn't understand. If I miss a class, then I miss part of the work they done and I don't want to do that, get behind and stuff.' (Helen, 48)

Participants described how they felt involved and being able to make a contribution. There were descriptions of being in control, fitting in and being grown up. Barton et al (2006) identify feeling in control as significant in enabling individuals to move forward in their lives and participants felt that this was a very positive aspect of the type of course they were engaged in.

> 'you don't feel on the edge of it. Axxx asks me what I want to cover next. She has a syllabus but we talk about it. If I have something coming up at work, she says to bring it to the next lesson and we work on that together. It's my session and we work on it together.' (Jim. 50)

> '....no one's in charge really. Everyone talks about it and works together. This week it could be my stuff and the next

week someone else brings it in. I like it, you know, it's grown up learning.' (Roy, 31)

Individuals also described a range of positive experiences associated with learning that they had not had previously. They felt that they could relax and try new things without worrying that they would be embarrassed if they didn't get it right. This is linked to a sense of being in control and being able to make active choices which McGivney (2001) and Barton et al (2006) highlight as an outcome of locally based delivery which takes the trouble to find out and meet the needs of individuals. There was a sense of enjoyment and being able to take a chance without worrying that something negative would happen.

'I don't sit at the back here, I don't mind saying what I think the answer is. Nobody laughs if you get it wrong.'(Jane, 24)

'I don't feel thick if I can't answer, we just go over how to get it right.' (Adam, 43)

'I've got lots of answers wrong but I do get some right. Whatever you do though, it's ok. It's more relaxed, no one shows off and the teacher, sorry tutor, isn't out to make themselves look clever.' (Paul, 42)

Individuals were asked whether the course that they were currently enrolled on was covering all the things that they felt they needed help with and also whether there was anything that they would like to have covered that wasn't in the course? Most individuals said that they had been asked what they wanted from the course as part of their initial discussions or during the first couple of sessions. They felt that they had had an opportunity to influence the things that were being taught on the course.

'when I first come down, we sat and talked about what things I needed. I also did a test, which give her an idea of where I wasn't

good at stuff. I wanted to be able to read Jxxx's letters (her grand daughter) which is how it started.' (Sue, 63)

'we all had the chance to say what we'd like to do. When you've got lots of people in a class you cant do it all, can you, but if there is something you need, Pxxxx will do it with you when the others are doing something else.' (Chloe, 22)

One of the key reasons given by Woolf et al (2006) for the failure of the Skills policy to meet its goals, is that implementation structures are increasingly having to focus on strategic objectives rather than taking into account the need for local flexibility. Some individuals said that they had initially been given a chance to say what they would like to do but that sometimes they felt that there were problems fitting it all into the sessions. In policy implementation terms, these difficulties in meeting individual needs is certainly linked to the amount of funding available but, more importantly, to the ability to use local networks to provide greater choice . It is often only possible by relying on local flexibility and often on the goodwill of the tutors. Taylor and Wilson (2006) emphasise the importance of variation and flexibility at local level in meeting local need.

'oh yeah, we did a plan at the beginning, but there's lots of plans and only so many hours in the course. I suppose that the tutor has to put it all together and do the most they can.' (Roy, 31)

'Sometimes you want to ask but there's not enough time so you forget and it gets left. I put it in my book though and I'll ask again when there's time in a lesson.' (Jane, 24)

All of the interviewees felt that their courses were flexible and that the tutor was prepared to make changes to the format or include new things in the lessons depending on what the group or individuals wanted. They described examples of one to one time with the tutor and being able to discuss their individual problems when they needed to.

'I had the letter from the Housing but I couldn't work it out. I brung it to the session and we looked at it together. Lxxxx and Jxxxx had had one as well so they was interested. We can do stuff like that which is good.' (Claire, 19)

'I've brought job applications in for Pxxxx to look at and its helped me to fill them in. You can make it fit what's happening, that's what I like about it.' (Moira, 53)

'If there's anything I need help with, I can ask. Sometimes we talk about it as a class but sometimes I sit with Txxxx and we do it quietly while the others are busy. She'll stay a bit afterwards and do it as well, like when our Dxxxxx was in hospital.' (Brenda, 27)

Being listened to and being able to actively participate in shaping their learning activity is vital to maintain the engagement of adults in learning, particularly those who have had poor previous experiences of formal learning (Barton et al, 2006). Participants in the research described being able to have an input into decisions about their learning, feeling able to decide for themselves and make choices. They also described having an increased understanding of the relationship between making choices and accepting the consequences of that choice.

'it's up to me now, can't blame anyone else, it's up to me.' (Roy, 31)

This is in contrast to the analysis in chapter five, where individuals did not describe the link between an action and its consequence. Rogers (2002) considers this positive response to increasing choice and involvement by learners in decision making to be a significant element of effective engagement of adults in learning. As individuals felt that they were being asked to take part in making decisions about the course and how it developed, they described being increasingly comfortable with making choices for themselves. They were also

able to relate the choices they made directly to the potential consequences they might experience and to take responsibility for these.

In order to give individuals the opportunity to choose provision in a format that best meets their needs, it is essential that policy implementation locally is able to provide as wider range of provision options as possible. Being able to do this, requires that funding can be used flexibly at local level to ensure that courses are delivered through a range of alternative approaches. At the time of the study, the local LSC did have considerable autonomy over the way in which funding for delivering skills for life provision and for the way in which it worked with local partners and stakeholders (L&R LSC, 2001). Funding was devolved locally, albeit attached to local targets, but the responsibility for the development and delivery of appropriate local solutions was given to the local Learning and Skills Council.

2. **Learners should have access to clear support and guidance so that they can understand what they need to do to progress and (3) should be supported to develop individual action plans and establish short and long term goals for their learning**

In considering these two elements of Skills for Life policy, three further personal factors, identified in chapter five, have potential significance in this context for individuals in engaging with formal learning. The first, a distrust of formal learning and its' institutions, arose out of a feeling that those in authority did not take them seriously and in some cases, were described as being proactively antagonistic. Individuals did not feel that they mattered within the institution which led them to feel that they could not depend on help or support from others. Secondly, negative feelings about meeting new people, and having new experiences were used to explain why individuals opted out of formal learning and were reluctant to re-engage. Barton et al (2006) identifies issues of lack of trust arising

from past experiences as being significant in adults choices about learning. The role played by tutors can be vital in helping individuals to understand where they are and what they are able to do (McGivney, 2001). Relationships with others are crucial (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) where these relationships break down or are not established positively in the first place, it can create considerable barriers to an individuals moving forward (Barton et al, 2006). Two further personal factors are relevant here, i.e. not feeling able to cope and low self esteem. Individuals described feeling left behind or not understanding what was required of them. They felt that they were at a disadvantage and that they were not able to catch up with others. McGivney (2001) suggests that where individuals consider themselves to be outside the mainstream, a consequence of this is not feeling able or motivated to participate.

In contrast, when participants described their current course, they identified a range of relationships which they felt had developed. These were characterised as positive and supportive, both with their tutor and with other learners on the course. There was a considerable contrast with the school and teacher relationships described in their previous formal learning experiences in chapter five. Individuals talked about their relationship with their tutor and with other people in their group in positive ways which indicated that they felt able to trust, take advice from others, give and receive support and discuss issues in their lives in ways they were not able to do in the past.

> 'Lxxxx understands what you mean, she's taking time to understand, she'll listen for as long as it takes. I feel better when I've been to class.' (Claire, 19)

> '....its like having big sisters, they was there for me when he buggered off, that was the only thing kept me going, coming to class, having them helping and understanding what I was going through like.' (Helen, 48)

'.....didn't have no body to talk to really, but its' different now. If I need advice like, everyone's had the same problems or something like it, so they can help and give you support and stuff. The tutor knows all about what's happening at home and sometimes it just helps to let someone else know.' (Lily, 20)

Participants said they were positive about the relationship they had formed with other class members. For many, coming out to the course was described as freedom from isolation and for others, it meant being able to access group support for issues not necessarily related to learning. There was an overall sense of confidence and being able to trust other people. Once again this is considered to be a distinguishing factor in effective locally responsive provision (Barton et al, 2006) which has the potential to make a real difference in supporting previously marginalised individuals to stay engaged with a course.

'we've all got the same problems, and you can listen to how others have sorted stuff out, we've got quite close.' (Helen,48)

'....before I wouldn't say anything but we've all had problems so you don't feel different. Everyone understands.' (Moira, 53)

'we're like family, we go out together sometimes. We know each others' stories.' (Jane, 24)

'they're my new family, I don't feel I'm on my own any more. It's changed my life.' (Sue, 63)

In their narratives, their current courses were seen as providing some security and predictability for individuals. They described feeling increasingly able to take part in the learning activity and to have an influence on it. They felt that they were in control of what was happening to them and that the class was a place where they could always be sure of things being predictable. It was important to the

interviewees that they felt they were able to cope in the classroom situation and with what they were being asked to learn.

> 'no matter what has happened at home, the class is here every week, except in the holidays though. I wouldn't miss it, I like being here and doing the work. You don't have to think about other stuff while you're here. Just concentrate on the work. I always feel better after I've been to class. ' (Chloe, 22)

> 'they don't let you down. I can't remember Axxx ever missing a session and that's in three years. They're dedicated. The sessions are every week regularly.' (Adam, 53)

As individuals come to develop trust in their tutors, they increasingly described seeing the system as being supportive and their relationships with those in authority seemed to improve at the same time. Participants described their interactions with training providers, the host organisation and their tutors in positive terms. This is mirrored in other projects such as the Fellowship Scheme Research Project (Bennetts, 2002) which identifies 'transformed relationships' as one of six significant transformation categories cited by participants in that study. Individuals also described themselves as feeling part of the group and not being excluded from activities in class. This was is contrast to their descriptions of previous learning experiences described in chapter 5.

> '.....they're not like teachers used to be. They listen and let you decide some of the things you want to do. Pxxxx takes the time to ask what you'd like to do, I can bring bits from home and we have a go in class. Miss Oxxxx, at school, she never listened at all, they didn't think you was worth nothing. Our class at Lxxxx and the way they do it, gives you respect.' (Dan,47)

'.....brilliant really, I feel like I have a say and that they are listening. They want to help me, it's about what I want really.' (Paul, 42)

Individuals said that they felt connected to the group and thus able to participate in shaping it. These descriptions potentially relate to what Lave and Wenger (1991) consider as a developing consensus around a series of common ideas and experiences between individual group or class members which might relate to the emergence of communities of practice within these groups. Lave and Wenger (1991) characterise a community of practice as not just a group which forms around skills or specific learning but see it as involved with the development of relationships between group members linked to those issues which matter to the people involved. Participants in the research had many experiences in common. For many of them participating in their current class, there was, what Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as a complex commonality of experience which can be pooled and therefore provide support and knowledge which members of the group can tap in to.

Participants were also asked if they had been able to talk to someone about their course and if they knew how to find out about what they could do next if they wanted to carry on. While the descriptions varied in terms of specific details, individuals were able to explain what their course was and what it could be used for. They were able to feel in control and that they understood what they were involved in.

'its for adults, the government does it for adults so that they can read and write better. It's the first certificate I've got, it's a proper qualification.' (Sue, 63)

'The course is called Lifeskills and it'll be a qualification in Literacy. I can use it for if I go for a job. You get a certificate which is recognized for jobs.' (Jane, 24)

However, several individuals described their course as being continuous. They had been on 'the course' for a couple of years and although they were aware of having done tests and getting certificates along the way, they didn't see themselves as having done several different courses. Others were clear that they were progressing through a series of stages and that they had been moving up through progressively 'harder' levels of work. Which view they took depended very much on the type of provision they were accessing. Individuals on college provision, both on and off site, were clear about how they were progressing whereas for the most part, those accessing their provision through Adult and Community Learning particularly at neighbourhood sites or through voluntary organisations, were less clear.

> 'I've just done this course, ever since I came here two years ago. We can do some tests, and I have, but I don't want to go to another course. I like doing this one and coming here.' (Lily, 20)

> 'you get help and there's somewhere for the kids to go. They look after everything so I wouldn't want to go somewhere else. Its English we're doing, I think we can do a test when we're ready. I'll be nervous about that but we don't have to do it until we're ready.' (Claire,19)

Most individuals did not feel that they needed more information than they had been given and were happy with the way in which they and their course were developing. The Skills for Life policy (DfES, 2001) emphasises supporting individuals to progress into further learning, the approach taken to this, has to depend on the needs of the individual at the time. However, simply raising expectations is not all that is required (Preece, 2001), support should be appropriate and progress measured in terms of the individual distance traveled. Individuals were developing supportive relationships with their tutor and group but were not necessarily clear about their future learning path. These relationships are crucial for learners and their value is

acknowledged in the National Audit Office report (NAO, 2008) who recommend that the Learning and Skills Council should encourage the voluntary sector to play a bigger role delivering the Skills for Life strategy. However, in order to do this, local networks responding to local need are essential and this is not the direction in which broader Skills policy and its funding is being taken and it is this contradiction which Taylor and Wilson (2006) identify as contributing to a mismatch between policy intention and its consequences.

Participants said that being able to do things for themselves was a positive experience and that they were realising that they could achieve things for themselves whereas they had not felt this in the past at school. They felt they could be successful at something if they worked at it. Achievement of individual goals is a key motivating factor in increasing participation in further learning (Barton et al, 2006). Individuals described how they felt increasingly confident in their ability to do things on their own, in and out of the class. They felt that they were being successful when they tried new things and that this was encouraging them to go even further.

> 'I couldn't do this before, it was like too much going round in my head but now if I decide to do it, I can. Some days it's easier than others but I don't give up now. I've done it, so I can do it again.' (Chloe, 22)

> '.....answering questions, putting ticks instead of crosses on me work. All those years of nothing, feeling fucking stupid, but now it's all different, I get stuff right, I've passed exams. I'd like them to see me now.' (Dan, 47)

Participants also described having a sense of moving forward and making progress as a result of the classes, they felt able to look forward. There were indications of their 'imagined futures' (Barton et al, 2006) and there was evidence in their narratives that they considered that they were increasingly able to make plans and set out future goals. The development of this capacity is one of the

challenges of effective implementation of policy at a local level (Preece, 2001) Individuals said they felt able to take responsibility for themselves and their families.

> 'I do volunteering at the centre now. I'd like to keep doing that to help out. When the kids go to school, I'll definitely get a job. I want to support the kids myself not from benefits. I'd like to be a secretary or do an admin job. Never thought I would, but now I'm determined.' (Lily, 20)

> '...they asked if I would be interested in the promotion, from the tools to a foreman's job but I just said no. I said I didn't like working inside but I really couldn't cope with the health and safety stuff. Now it's different, and when the chance comes up next year, I'll say yes thanks, I'll take it!' (Adam, 43)

> 'I'd never have believed it, I was going nowhere, no confidence at all. Its all different now, I know what I want. I'll do the Women in Business course next term. Couldn't see it before, but now I can see myself owning my own hairdressers, in the future like. I can't wait!' (Brenda, 27)

All of the interviewees said that they had worked with their tutor to put together an individual action plan setting out their learning goals for the course. All were able to describe it and state what their learning goals were, but some were less clear about the purpose of the action plan, and some had no recollection of having it updated. Others described using the plan to chart their progress and considered that it was regularly updated in discussions with their tutor. Again, there were differences between those on FE college provision and those on ACL courses. Those individuals on College courses were much clearer about their individual learning plans and the goals that they had set. They were also much more involved, and concerned with being involved, in updating their plan regularly and charting their progress towards their goals. Those on ACL provision

seemed less aware of the purpose of the plans, did not seem to take part in updating their plans and did not have a particular interest in doing so.

> 'Our own action plans. We've all got one. We did it the first couple of weeks and its got our own plan with what we want to do. We have a review every couple of weeks and put down what we've done. My aim is to get my promotion at work so we put down what I needed to do. I've done some of the qualification, but there's still more to do. (Paul, 42)

> 'it was one of the first things we did at the first session. She knew what I wanted 'cos the HR person had told her like, but we went through it all and its written down. We can add other stuff and we go through it every now and again. It's like a plan, I suppose.' (Adam, 43)

> 'I come every week unless one of them is sick. It's a break and the kids are looked after. They asked about what I wanted to do when I first come down. Don't remember writing anything down, but perhaps Dxxxx did, I don't know.' (Claire, 19)

4. Learners should have access to a clear set of nationally recognised qualifications

In the descriptions of their previous experiences of formal learning, participants did not indicate achievement of qualifications as a key issue. Some said that they had not achieved any qualifications and others indicated that they had left school early and so had not had an opportunity to sit exams. This relates to personal factors such as feeling that learning is not them and low self esteem amongst others. Individuals did not consider that they were amongst those who could benefit from learning and their lack of achievement seemed to reinforce this view they had of themselves. This can have a direct impact in terms of self esteem, and McGivney (2001) believes that

this is one reason why adults take themselves out of the way of learning opportunities, choosing to actively disengage from the process. In policy terms, Preece (2001) makes the point that it is unhelpful to blame individuals for their non-participation when there are a complex range of factors which impact on their willingness to participate. At a local level, implementation strategies need to recognise this complexity and make allowances for it as far as possible. This requires a close understanding of the needs of the individual and flexibility in terms of making it happen at neighbourhood level. Wilkinson and Craig (2002) identify the key role of effective local partnerships in making this happen. In any local context the involvement of the public and third sector as well as local providers are crucial to making a difference. Taylor and Wilson (2006) refer to the need for policy to be an 'enabling framework', local partnerships and networks are key to effective delivery within that framework.

In describing their current experiences, there were some examples of participants not seeming to be clear about what course they were doing. All the courses were Adult Literacy courses between Entry level 3 and Level 2, they had a range of different titles; some were called Literacy for Adults, some simply English classes, others Skills for Life and in one case, the course was called Lifeskills. When asked, all participants were able to describe what they felt the purpose of the course was but their comments tended to be framed in terms of their specific goals rather than those of the policy. There is a lack of a clear link between policy goals and those of the policy 'user'(Bochel et al, 2007) since the 'user' is not involved in policy development in any significant way. Feedback about the impact of policy is important for the interaction between policy development and policy implementation (Hill, 2003), and in ensuring that policy creates an enabling framework (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) which will have a positive impact.

> 'it'll will help me read better. They are all at school now and you want to be able to help when they bring stuff home. Its

English, I didn't do very well at school but this is better.'
(Brenda, 27)

'Spelling's my worst. You can't fill in a job form with bad spelling or you haven't got a chance. It's a literacy course but it's for adults so it covers the things that you have problems with. The government pays I think, they want everyone to be able to read and write better.' (Roy, 31)

Individuals were asked if they knew what their course was and whether they would have a qualification at the end of it. Responses here were mixed, with some individuals understanding what their course was, although most interviewees were clear that they would get a qualification and a certificate at the end of the course. The Government has placed considerable focus on the achievement of qualifications for Skills for Life learners (DfES, 2001), seeing this as a way of encouraging individuals to continue to progress with their learning. The value of qualifications to an individual can be seen as being both personal and practical. There is evidence to suggest that gaining a qualification can have an impact on being able to get a job or progress in work (Jenkins, 2006) and the need to have qualifications to have a better chance in economic terms is acknowledged by learners (Warmington, 2003). However, it is the personal significance of having tangible evidence of being able to achieve something which has considerable significance for individuals who have had poor previous experiences of school or learning (McGivney, 2001).

'an Adult Certificate in Literacy – level 1 I think, the one I did last year was below that. Next I'll do the maths one but I'm rubbish at maths so I don't know if I'll pass!' (Brenda, 27)

'I've done the national tests on the computer. You get an adult literacy certificate, they do one for maths as well.' (Adam, 43)

'my aim is to get my English and Maths GCSE's. If I get my level 2 literacy and numeracy that's the same, and I can put it

in my CV. If you want a better job, you have to have qualifications.' (Paul, 42)

'I'll have qualifications which I didn't have when I left school. You need them for the Foreman's job, at least your maths and English especially reading and writing. I've got two more tests to do and then I'll have my level 2. Don't know what I'll do then!' (Adam, 43)

Individuals said that they attached a lot of value to having achieved qualifications. For many, these were the first that they had achieved and they were described as a source of pride, as evidence of their current progress and as proof that they were not stupid or thick.

> 'I've done entry level 2 and 3 and now I'm on level one English, they gave me certificates with my name on saying I'd passed. The kids have put them up on the fridge for me. It's the first certificates I've had like so they're proud. I like to see them there.' (Dan, 47)

> '....when they called my name it was the proudest day of my life, the Mayor presented the certificate, and I got a book token as well. I didn't win the laptop prize but the certificate was framed and I felt so proud. My daughter was crying when I got back to my seat, and she grabbed my hand and said well done Mum. It made me cry too.' (Helen, 48)

Some of the participants described being able to access a range of tangible benefits such as childcare, financial support, free time and advice and support as being important to them in doing the course. These were extrinsic, structural factors (McGivney, 2001) rather than the intrinsic, personal ones which were the focus of the research, however some participants consistently commented on these so they have been included here for completeness. This was particularly evident where the provision was delivered through a local community centre or through a specific voluntary organisation where the degree

of generalised support for the individual appeared to extensive, and included an element of mentoring as part of the support that was offered. This high level of support is characteristic of organisations working within communities in that they are specifically focused on the wider needs of the individual (Barton et al, 2006) as well as providing courses. For example, where childcare was offered as a support measure, individuals described this as being of considerable importance and great benefit. Getting this time off from parental responsibility and other family problems seemed to be of considerable significance for the individuals concerned. While it is clear that providing appropriate support such as childcare is essential in encouraging individuals back into learning (McGivney, 2001), for some of the individuals interviewed, attending the course seemed to be considered something that had to be done in order to access the childcare support. This was particularly the case at the voluntary sector venue. Further research would be interesting to look into the nature of the relationship between the individual, the host organisation and the provision of learning. It is possible that taking part in learning activity was considered as part of the 'price paid' by individuals in order to access the other benefits such as childcare, time off from daily responsibilities and help with a range of social issues such as dealing with social security.

> 'I wouldn't miss it, the kids are safe and I can have me time. It does you good, and when you go home you feel happier. No I wouldn't miss it.' (Lily, 20)

> 'I don't mind doing the course, they're all nice like. It means I can get some time off from the kids, they get fed too. I'd come more often if I could. It's a break, like.' (Jane, 24)

> 'only when he's sick, you can't bring them to the crèche when they're sick. I wouldn't miss coming to GXX otherwise.' (Claire, 19)

Individuals described what they felt to be the practical benefits of doing the course in their family, community and working lives (Barton et al, 2006). They felt able to take part in social and community activities; take opportunities to get on at work and to be able to develop a more supportive relationship with their children through activities such as being able to read to children and help them with their homework.

> '.....I enjoy our quiet time before they go to bed. I couldn't read to them before but I do now. It feels better, more calmer I think. They used to just drive me mad but now, I feel like their mum more.' (Jane, 24)

> 'volunteering at the centre, giving back a bit of what they gave me. You feel worth summat, you know.' (Helen, 48)

Interviewees valued qualifications and were pleased to have the opportunity to access them. Even those individuals who were not directly focused on achieving a qualification felt that it was a positive experience and were happy to receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement. In the early days of the implementation of the Skills for Life strategy, the view of many Skills for Life tutors was that the pressure resulting from the need to take tests and achieve a qualification would be negative for learners. It is worth noting that this was not the case with one of the tutors I spoke with as part of the planning for the research, they felt that their learners valued qualifications.

> 'they enjoy getting a qualification. I make sure that they are ready to take the test but there's no doubt that they feel good about it. Definitely a positive.' (Tutor)

Participants who had taken tests said that they felt positive about the experience and the outcome and those who had not, while feeling apprehensive, described feeling that it was worth it. Again there would seem to be a difference between the views of learners about

the impact of policy and those of the tutors. From a policy perspective, it would be important to look at these differences in perception in order to establish whether these have an impact on the way in which learning is delivered (Malins, 2008). This would be a significant area for further research arising from this initial work.

Participants viewed their current experiences of formal learning as positive and were enthusiastic about the impact they had had. Individuals said that they were enjoying their classes, were able to understand the work and felt part of the group. They liked their tutors and found that they could get on well with other members of the group. Furthermore, they felt it had given them a new set of opportunities that they could take advantage of (Barton et al, 2006). Initially, reflecting on this, I was concerned about the considerable difference between participants' previous experiences and their current ones. Previous experiences were described as being extremely negative and current experiences as being very positive, was it possible to have such clearly defined difference? However, their views reflected those of newly engaged learners in the studies by Barton et al (2006) about the difference that learning had made to their lives and to the way they were able to cope. While I was working with a small group of individuals, and had been aware from the start that there would necessarily be limits on the broader applicability (Arksey and Knight, 1999) of the findings from the study, the results did reflect those from other studies (Schuller et al, 2004 ; Barton et al, 2006) . However, I had also been keen to ensure that any conclusions coming out of the study were developed from what had been said by the individuals that I interviewed and that this was what the data was telling me. It seemed that the participants' previous experiences had been so poor that, to some extent, they were accepting of their current experiences, and very enthusiastic about them, because of the contrast with their earlier experiences (McGivney, 2001). They seemed to be almost uncritical of their current class because it presented such a contrast with what had happened previously. Further work on this, with individuals who have

taken up other learning opportunities would be useful in establishing whether or not this uncritical approach was maintained.

In summary, the responses from the individuals in this study seemed to indicate that the aims of the current Skills for Life policy (DfES, 2001) are being broadly achieved with respect to the four elements identified. There were differences between responses from individuals across the varying types of local provision. Individuals whose courses were being delivered by an FE college either within the college or in the workplace, were more able to make links between their local activity and achievements and the aims of national policy. This was particularly noticeable with respect to the individual's acceptance of the need to increase skills levels in the UK and the importance of skills for employment. One of the broader goals of Government Skills policy is to convince individuals of the importance of gaining skills for improving employability (BIS, 2009) and certainly for some of the participants, there was evidence that they were convinced of this. However, for those taking part in learning through less formal routes and in voluntary and community venues, the connection to the national policy agenda was less apparent. In terms of local implementation, it was a notable feature of the responses that participants accessing provision through voluntary and community routes tended to have less awareness of the links to national policy and to have more focus on what practical advantages in terms of access to other support and services was available to them as part of the learning offer at the venue (Barton et al, 2006).

Summary

In general, participants felt that their current experiences of learning were so much better than their previous ones, usually of school, that they tended not to be critical of their current course. While there were some differences across the provision types in terms of the depth and consistency of support available to the learner, there were no negative comments made during the interviews and where issues

were potentially identified, such as having too many people to be able to deal with all issues, this was considered to be not so much a problem or failing of the provision, but rather as an inevitable consequence of trying to meet the demands of large classes. From a policy implementation standpoint, larger class sizes are a function of the increasing inflexibility of the funding regime (L&R LSC, 2001) , but this is not apparent to the learner and was not reflected in their comments. It is, however, of considerable significance to those responsible for the implementation of policy locally, and it remains one of the more significant issues raised by tutors in terms of local delivery especially in a rural area such as Lincolnshire (Atkin and O'Grady, 2007).

For some learners it was clear that their learning activity was closely associated with being able to access other types of support such as childcare and help with benefit and housing claims. These individuals did not seem to consider the learning activity to be their primary goal but regarded it rather as something that was part of an overall package available to them. This was a particular issue with individuals accessing learning through voluntary organisations and in the community. In terms of local implementation of policy, this has implications with regard to strategies which make best use of local community links and structures (Taylor and Wilson, 2006 ; Tett, 2002). This is once again, potentially of particular significance in rural areas as well as in seeking ways to take learning out into harder to reach communities. Recently, however, nationally and regionally the LSC's emphasis in terms of contracting for provision with larger broader based providers (LSC, 2007) creates a mismatch between this approach and the need to ensure that provision is as locally focused as possible. At a neighbourhood level, it is vital to make best use of multiple agencies including employers in the delivery of an appropriate learning offer, which emphasizes the importance of interpreting policy and implementing it in a way which supports neighbourhood needs (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). In arguing for 'people based' policies, Griggs et al (2008) emphasise the importance of local influence on the way in which policies are put into

practice. Work at local level through community based Learning Community sites in Lincolnshire has demonstrated how effective this joined up approach can be for individuals, communities and other local stakeholders. Nationally though, despite the intention for policy to be locally directed, the way it is funded and increasingly the way in which it is procured, mitigates against effective local delivery.(Hill, 2003 ; Griggs et al, 2008)

This chapter outlined the results of the analysis of the second research question, looking at the descriptions of participants' current experiences of formal learning. The outcomes of this analysis were then compared with the themes from the previous chapter which considered past experiences of learning. The main focus of chapters five and six has been to bring out what the participants were saying during the interviews and as such I have used many direct quotes. My aim was to make sure that the learners were able to speak for themselves through the interviews (Robson, 2002). The following chapter attempts to bring together all of the issues raised through this process and to look, firstly, at the extent to which the research questions have been answered. Secondly, to identify the main implications for local policy which emerge from the data and finally to consider what the topics for further research might be.

Chapter 7: Evaluation and conclusions

This chapter considers the outcomes from the data analysis chapters and bring together the various elements into a series of conclusions, considering their implications for the local implementation of policy and its' impact on individuals. First, it will briefly revisit the aims of the study in terms of the approach taken, considering how the study has developed and evolved from the original research plan. Next, it will identify the main outcomes and significant issues arising from each of the research questions, put forward tentative answers to the research questions and consider what further work might evolve out of each of these. Thirdly, it will look at the implications of the outcomes in terms of the broader aims of the study. It will consider the potential impact on local practice with respect to policy implementation (Hill, 2003) and draw some tentative conclusions with respect to future adult skills policy implementation within Lincolnshire. Section four will highlight possible gaps in the research, where more detailed work is needed and put forward suggestions as to how this might be taken forward, both in terms of my intended focus in the future as well as more general research activity which might be undertaken. Finally, there is a section which reflects on the research process itself, the specific issues that have arisen and considers the negatives and positives of the approach taken and considers the lessons learned on the journey.

There is an important interaction between policy development and policy implementation (Hill, 2003). If the development of policy does not take into account the potential impact that it will have at a local level, then its' intended outcomes may not be achieved (Woolf et al, 2006). The aim of this study was illuminate these issues of local policy implementation and its impact on individuals by talking to learners about their past and present experiences of formal learning. These narratives (Barton et al, 2006) were used to establish if their described experiences could be shown to have had an impact on the way individuals felt about formal learning and to try to find out more

about what McGivney (2001) refers to as personal factors and how these could have the potential to create barriers to engaging in formal learning. Research question one used participants' descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning to look specifically at what these factors might be and what impact they might have on that individual's view about formal learning. Research question two concentrated on participants' current experiences in literacy classes to consider the impact of four specific elements of Skills for Life policy using these as examples of policy implemented at a local level (DfES, 2001).

On a personal level, my concern was very much to allow the individuals' narratives to lead the analysis (Robson, 2002) in describing their experiences and it was important to me to carry out the study in a way which put this approach at the centre of the work. Professionally, my interest was to see if what the learners were saying about their experiences had relevance for my role in the development and implementation of local Skills for Life policy (L&R LSC, 2001) in Lincolnshire

Evaluation and comment

The broader question at the centre of the study was to see if what individuals' tell us about their experiences of formal learning has implications for the way in which adult skills policy is implemented at a local level and to what extent does the increasing centralisation of policy development impact on the ability of local implementation structures to meet the needs of individuals.

The specific research questions were developed from this, and focussed on past and present formal learning experiences described by Skills for Life learners across three different types of provider and a range of teaching sites. The underpinning theory for the study was the work of Hill (2003) considering the potential dislocation between policy development and policy implementation and the impact this might have on individuals at a local level. Also of relevance was the work of Griggs et al (2008) who emphasise that the impact of policy

depends on the recipient and their experiences as well as the policy itself. Taylor and Wilson (2006) identify the potential for an implementation gap when policies from the centre do not take sufficient account of the needs and contexts of local neighbourhoods, considering that insufficient work is done to study the impact of policy at a local and individual level. Newman (2002) also believes that as policy becomes more centralised, it is vital to ensure that individual impact is considered. In seeking to establish a framework for the impact of policy on individuals, I considered the work of McGivney (2001) on the reasons why some adults do not engage with formal learning, particularly those factors considered as 'personal' and of Barton et al (2006) who emphasise the significance of an individuals' experience in shaping their decisions about how and when to engage in formal learning.

Originally the study plan was complex, including three multi-layered case studies at three different provider sites, which would involve a range of research methods such as focus groups, semi-structured interviews and class observations. The initial plan was to work with learners and tutors at all three sites. However, this initial plan proved to be far too ambitious in terms of focus and timescales, reflecting enthusiasm rather than reality! In order to be able to concentrate on listening to the learners describe their experiences, and to allow them the time they needed to do so (Coffey, 1999), it was necessary to scale down the other elements of the research plan. So while interviews were conducted with learners from a wider range of provision sites than was originally intended, some other elements such as class room observation and interviews with curriculum managers were eliminated altogether and others such as interviews with tutors were reduced. Focus groups were used in the initial stages to help to refine the interview questions but these were not conducted at each site. Initially, the need to reduce the overall size of the study was a source of frustration but as the work progressed, and I became aware of the richness and complexity of the data being collected, I was determined to allow the individuals the time they needed. The main method used for the research were the semi-

structured interviews (Robson, 2002) with individual participants. It is on the data from these interviews that the analysis in chapters five and six as well as the evaluation and conclusion that follow are based. Each of the research questions is addressed below:

Q1 : Do an individual's descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning indicate that there are 'personal' factors which may influence their further choices about engaging in formal learning?

All of the individuals who took part in the study described their experience of school in this part of their interview. For some that experience had been over 30 years before while for others it was a matter of two or three years since they had left school. None had had other experiences of learning between school and their current course, although some had been attending their current course for several months. While the details around their age and date at which they had left school were often not well remembered, all of the participants recalled some of their past experiences very specifically and in some detail. They had vivid memories of school which had stayed with them into their adult lives. These experiences impacted on the views they had about getting involved in learning as adults and had been significant in influencing their future choices about learning (McGivney, 2001)

Several personal factors were identified as being of significance in shaping the individuals' views about formal learning. These factors had the potential to influence their attitudes to engaging in learning (McGivney, 2001) and as a result, could affect the impact of a particular policy on that individual (Griggs et al, 2008). Their experiences seemed to have left them with a suspicion of formal learning and the institutions where it takes place (Barton et al, 2006). Individuals talked about not being comfortable with entering new places or new situations and of being apprehensive about meeting new people. They often described being reluctant to put themselves into a situation where they might need to do something different or deal with new information, and that this had prevented them from

considering doing any further learning. Barton et al, 2006 established that formal learning could be associated with high levels of anxiety, stress and failure for socially excluded people and that individuals were reluctant to put themselves in similar positions again. There were examples of this given in the narratives described in chapter five. Another factor was that of poor relationships with teachers at school. Individuals felt that they had been outsiders, McGivney (2001) identifies this as individuals believing that they were in some way different or undeserving and that learning was not for them. Participants described situations where it had been difficult for them to get support from teachers or individuals in authority which often translated into a distrust of those seen as being in authority in their adult lives and here again, there were examples of learning being associated with high levels of stress, fear and personal risk (Barton et al, 2006). A further factor was that of feeling that they were unable to cope with the situations they found themselves in. They described feeling that they were slow or stupid or difficult and of having difficulty in keeping up with others in their classes. This view was reinforced because they didn't see themselves as having any positive achievements from their school days so that they had no examples of personal success in learning to draw upon. Much is made in policy rhetoric about the need to raise individual expectations (DCSF/DIUS, 2008) in order to encourage socially excluded indivduals to engage in learning, however Preece (2001) makes the point that this approach ignores the real complexity of issues for socially excluded people. A further factor, related to this, was individuals describing feeling unable to make choices for themselves in a learning context. This feeling of not being in control contributes to the characteristically chaotic experiences of socially excluded individuals (Barton et al, 2006). Individuals thought that they were not able to influence what happened to them at school. This lack of 'practice' at making choices meant that individuals didn't consider that they were competent to make decisions about the future. They were unable to see a way in which they might be able to make a difference or change the pattern of their lives, or identify what Barton et al (2006) describe as 'imagined futures'. Taken together, these factors identified from the

narratives, are likely to have a considerable impact on how individuals make their future decisions about taking part in formal learning, which will in turn impact on the effectiveness of local policy implementation. If local policy implementation is to be successful, it needs to take into account the complexities of individual experience (Preece, 2001) in planning the way in which formal learning opportunities are delivered.

For the group of individuals participating in this study, and for the reasons given above, it would seem that the answer to the first research question is yes, an individual's descriptions of their past experiences of formal learning do indicate that there are 'personal' factors which may influence their further choices about engaging in formal learning. However, this study has only focused on a small number of learners, so it is not possible to generalise that their experiences are the same as the wider 'world' of adults in relation to formal learning (Robson, 2002). However, the individuals who took part in the study were from that target group of adults who are considered 'hard to reach' in adult skills policy terms. The LSC defines 'hard to reach' as adults who have not taken part in formal learning during the last three years (LSC, 2006). They were taking part in literacy courses through a range of different types of delivery, and as such were representative of those individuals at whom the Skills for Life strategy is targeted (DfES, 2001). If we are going to be effective in making sure that future policy meets the needs of these learners and others, it is important that we identify ways in which we can support their initial and further engagement with the learning process. This means ensuring that policy balances its' intention with its' consequences (Bochel et al, 2007), not only with respect to the goals of those developing policy but also in terms of the possible impact on recipients (Taylor and Wilson, 2006).

It is of concern, that while much of the evidence currently available and accepted by the current government (DIUS/DCSF, 2007) indicate that locally flexible implementation is most effective in engaging individuals into formal learning (Barton et al, 2006), there is

an increasing movement away from local autonomy towards less providers and bigger contract units delivered regionally (LSC, 2008). At a local level, giving individuals improved choice and flexibility over which courses they can access is essential to broadening participation (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). McGivney (2001) asserts that we should challenge the assumption that individuals don't participate in formal learning because of the attitudes and inadequacies of the individual, this view is supported by Preece (2001) who considers that blaming individuals for non-participation ignores the real issue of making sure that opportunities are locally available which meet the needs of individuals. It is crucial that we work at a local level to build the capacity for these local interventions into the policy frameworks in order to meet these needs. Rogers (2002) considers that we need to be approaching learners in new ways. We can more effectively build these 'new ways' by understanding more about what has occurred before and the impact it has on individuals. However, if this approach is to have a significant effect of the further development of policy, there need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that information on the impact of policy at local level is fed back in a meaningful and consistent way into policy development structures (Newman, 2002).

Q2: How do individuals describe their current experiences of formal learning and what are the implications of this for the implementation of national Skills for Life policy at a local level?

All of the individuals taking part in the study were enrolled on a literacy course. Some had been on the course for a while whereas others had only started the course recently when they took part in the interviews. All had taken the decision to enroll on the course in spite of their previous difficult experiences of formal learning and were able to compare their current experiences to those they had had previously. Once again, a range of personal factors emerged from the interviews. Firstly, individuals felt that they had been able to develop good relationships with their course tutor and with the other

people on the course, whereas the previous relationships they had described had been negative. Developing positive relationships is significant in an individual's decision making about continuing to participate in formal learning (Barton et al, 2006) and often these were described as being like having a new family or support mechanism, These relationships seemed to be characterised by an increasing ability to trust other people. Individuals felt that they were in control of what they were engaged in and saw the system as being very supportive, giving them security and predictability which, again, is a significant factor in continuing engagement (Schuller et al, 2004) Individuals also described being increasingly comfortable with interacting with authority figures in terms of being listened to and feeling that their needs were being met. Field (2006) identifies the issue of trust as being a significant element in the development of lifelong learning activity and McGivney (2001) considers that positive relationships with tutors is important for individuals if they are going to choose to continue with learning. A further factor which emerged was feeling able to make their own choices and being in control of decisions which affected them. They described taking part in decision making about the content and conduct of the course and feeling that they had the ability to influence what was happening to themselves and the group. This resonates with two of the key drivers for effective local implementation of skills policy, that is, to enable individuals at a local level to, firstly be able to influence what happens in policy terms (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) and secondly, to have a choice about how they engage with it (Griggs et al, 2008). Participants said they were increasingly able to relate the choices that they made to the consequences of that choice, whether positive or negative and in doing so, being able to accept responsibility for the outcome. This more positive understanding of the links between choice, consequences and responsibility is highlighted by other studies as being significantly influenced by positive experiences of learning (Barton et al, 2006 ; Schuller et al, 2004).

Individuals were positive in describing outcomes associated with their current formal learning which they characterised as being very

important to them and motivating. These were also linked to improvements in self esteem and confidence. Individuals described feeling that they were able to achieve and make progress, and that they were getting better at 'doing' things. They were able to give examples of what they felt were tangible successes and achievements in which they were able to take pride. Feelings of improved self worth are identified by Schuller et al, 2004 as one of the important benefits of learning, and as critical in the broader context of the individual's life in areas such as family and social relationships. While the current adult skills policy goals are on improving skills for a more successful economy (BIS, 2009), at a local level, the implementation of policy has to be concerned with what is appropriate for meeting the needs of the individuals and communities where delivery is taking place (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) and this includes taking account of the wider needs of individuals if the approach is to be successful in encouraging individuals to participate (Barton et al, 2006). There were also examples described of making plans for the future and feeling able to take responsibility for the direction of their lives with respect to family circumstances, further learning or getting a job. This capacity to look forward proactively and plan for their 'imagined' future (Barton et al, 2006) was not associated with their descriptions of their past formal learning experiences in chapter five, but emerged from their narratives about their current experiences. Participants described what they would like to do in the future or where they would like to be, and there was a sense of feeling able to influence those choices in a positive way. In answering the first part of research question two, participants described their current experiences of formal learning in a very positive way which indicated that the impact of the course, in terms of the relationships they developed, the approach to the course and their input into it, as well as their positive achievements, had been a very positive one which encouraged them to continue to be engaged. Once again, as outlined for research question one above, this was a small study and as such cannot be considered as representative of the wider views of learners, however the findings of this study do reflect the finding of other research such as McGivney

(2001), Barton et al (2006) and Schuller et al (2004) and as such can be said to support wider research on this topic (Arksey and Knight, 1999)

The second part of research question two considered the implications of individual experiences on the impact of specific elements of an adult skills policy. The policy used for the research, was the Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001) and four aspects of that policy were selected for the study. The first of these focused on the importance of courses being structured to meet the individual needs of the learner (DfES, 2001). There has been an emphasis on ensuring that provision meets learners needs across all recent adult learning policy iterations from the Learning Age (DfEE, 1998) to Leitch (DIUS, 2005). Currently, while decreasing potential for local impact on policy implementation by closing local LSC offices as part of its' transformation into the Skills Funding Agency, policy rhetoric maintains the assertion that the focus of policy remains on ensuring a demand-led system which meets the needs of employers and individuals (BIS, 2009). From their descriptions of their current experiences, individuals indicated that they had had opportunities to tell the tutor what they wanted from the course. They described the course as being flexible and feeling that the tutors were prepared to adapt the course when necessary. They said that they had access to 'one to one' time with their tutor, so that they could discuss specific problems and get help as they needed it. Some individuals were not clear about what specific course they were on and only those on college based provision were able to describe a link between their own goals, the course objectives and the government's focus on increasing skill levels. In future, adult skills policy will use 'skills accounts', proposed by the Leitch Review of Skills (DIUS, 2005) and adopted by its' implementation paper 'World Class Skills (DIUS, 2007) to deliver this element of choice to individuals, considering that Skills Accounts will make it possible for adults to access the full range of adult information, advice and guidance services they will need to be able to make informed choices about which courses they choose and how to access them (DIUS, 2007). However, Taylor and

Wilson (2006) argue that an effective, locally implemented framework to support policy is essential to ensure relevance to local need. The value of choice as a mechanism for delivering policy outputs which meet individual need is currently a consistent message across public policy (Clarke et al, 2006) and Skills Accounts are identified as the means by which individuals will be able to make their choices about learning in the future (BIS, 2009).

Elements two and three were considered together and were concerned with firstly, access to clear information and advice as well as secondly, developing action plans and personal goals about progression to further learning (DfES, 2001). As a regionalised structure for the implementation of adult skills policy becomes increasingly prominent in the commissioning of skills provision (LSC, 2008), the delivery of information to individuals will devolved to Skills Accounts and this will be the centralized, web-based resource that individuals will be able to access in order to obtain information about what courses are available in their local area (BIS, 2009). In the research data, there seemed to be a mixed understanding about which specific course they were participating in, but all learners seemed clear that their course would lead to a qualification or certificate. Several participants were not able to identify the level that they were at on their particular course whereas others were able to describe their past and future progression quite clearly. Those individuals accessing their course through community or voluntary sector venues were less likely to be able to describe the specifics of their course and its aims. Some individuals on this type of provision described the activity as being continuous rather than being able to identify discrete elements. However, in all cases, individuals said that they felt they had as much information as they needed or that they could get more information if they wanted it. All those interviewed were able to describe having been involved in the initial action planning and goal setting although some were less clear about why they had done so. Others described using their plan regularly and being actively involved in updating it. Once again the extent to which the plans were used depended on the type of provision, with college

based individuals being more likely to use their plans than those in voluntary sector based provision. Clarke et al (2006) assert that choice as an aim of public policy, if it is not supported by appropriate local practice, tends to devolve the stress of reconciling wants, needs and resources to the individual in place of providing consistent quality. In terms of adult skills policy and the need to encourage individuals to re-engage with formal learning, over reliance on the Skills Account as a method of enabling individuals to make choices about learning could be problematic for those who are at the margins of engaging in formal learning, since their previous experiences, as described in chapter five, might indicate that they need a significant level of personal support in order to help them to engage with learning again (Barton et al, 2006).

The fourth element chosen was access to qualifications. From the outset, the Government's Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001) aimed to ensure formal qualifications were are the heart of the development of provision and that learners were encouraged to take the national tests in literacy, numeracy and language. Learning and Skills Council funding was channeled to support delivery of the new range of qualifications and considerable resource was made available to local LSCs to enable them to build local capacity, not only of their provider networks but also to work with other local stakeholders to promote the take up of Skills for Life courses (LSC, 2000). While qualifications have a value both practically and personally for individuals (Field and Malcolm, 2006), there wider benefits of learning which could be said to be of greater significance, particularly for those who are socially excluded (Schuller, 2004). All of the learners were aware of the qualifications and that they were developed especially for adults. Some individuals were less aware of the levels and whether or not they were going to do the tests. However, all the individuals described qualifications as being important and that they considered that they were a good thing. All those who had taken the tests, felt that it was a positive experience while those who hadn't yet, were nervous but keen to have a go. Here again, policy change is making in roads into the potential for locally flexible delivery. LSC funding

can only be used to support a particular range of qualifications (LSC, 2006) and smaller, discretionary pots of funding are not able to support Skills for Life courses. This means that local flexibility to deliver courses which suit the needs of the individual is limited to what can be supported by the funding. This focus on qualifications would seem to have arisen out of the broader adult skills policy goal of emphasising skills acquisition as the priority for government funding rather than that the wider notion of lifelong learning (Coffield, 2000) set out by David Blunkett in Learning to Succeed (DfEE, 1999). Schuller et al (2004) and Barton et al (2006) might see qualifications and their practical value to individuals as less significant than the benefits in terms of increased self esteem which achievement brings with it.

Conclusions

Given my role in local policy implementation, working with local agencies and other stakeholders, to interpret and implement national policy, undertaking this research has had important implications, not only for increasing my own understanding of the policy implementation impact for individual learners, but also in shaping what I believe needs to be a fundamental change in the way that policy is implemented at a local level going forward. Hearing what individuals had to say about their previous learning experiences was profoundly disturbing but at the same time, I found it heartening that individuals are still finding opportunities to re-engage with learning in spite of their earlier experiences with the system. This is theme which is echoed in other studies such as those of Schuller et al (2004) and Barton et al (2006). My concern is that there appears to be a lack of understanding and consideration of the fundamental needs of individuals which means that the development of current national policy on adult skills is increasingly out of step with what is required at a local level to support learners, particularly those who are socially excluded. Policies are proposed to achieve national goals and centrally developed (Newman, 2002) rather than as a result of research into the circumstances of the lives of those who the policies

will affect most closely (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). The model is proposed, the moral imperative set and the implementation closely controlled through funding and targets (Field, 2006) and at the same time learning for economic prosperity and social justice is set as a personal obligation for citizens (DIUS, 2005). Coffield (1999) believes that lifelong learning has become a form of social control with individuals who do not participate being classed as being in some way deficient. Those individuals who took part in this study were able to find sufficient flexibility in the local interpretation of Skills for Life policy to meet their needs, and that is very positive but this is arguably because local flexibility was still possible (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). However, increasingly, this local flexibility is being challenged in the development of an ever more centralised approach. My concern is that while discovering a need to listen more carefully to what learners (and non-learners) have to say (LSC, 2009), the opportunities for this to influence policy implementation and delivery are reducing[8].

For the individuals interviewed, it was apparent from their descriptions of their current experiences, that they felt positive about their decision to enroll on their particular course. In spite of having had previously difficult learning experiences, they described their current learning activity as being enjoyable and supportive. There was very little difference looking across the types of provision with college based provision being described in the same positive terms as that available at community venues. It did seem as if the availability of practical support at some venues provided a particular type of support for some learners which wasn't available at other venues, particularly for those individuals who could be considered to be most vulnerable. This might be an area for further research with respect to what specifically encourages individuals to re-engage. However, McGivney (2001) considers that much of this has been done before and that policies on widening participation have 'come

[8] It should be noted that since the original research was carried out, the Learning and Skills Council has undergone a further change and will from April 2010 become the Skills Funding Agency (BIS, 2009). Local structures will no longer exist for adult programmes and budgets and contracting will be regionally controlled.

full circle'. Barton el al (2006) consider that what works is widely understood by practitioners and that what is needed is consistent funding and long term support for locally delivered activity.

Newman (2002) and Hill (2003) both identify implementation of policy as an area which is less well researched and consider that increasing opportunities to feedback about impact at local level is crucial in ensuring that policy intention is supported by effective local implementation. Certainly, in terms of this research, it seems that positive current experiences do impact on how individuals feel about undertaking formal learning. It is important, then that this information is gathered as feedback into the policy planning process and that policymakers take note of the information available to them (Rogers, 2002). This is currently done, to some extent, by the providers who give a range of opportunities for individuals to feedback and evaluate their learning experiences. Policy requires that providers undertake a formal review of their provision (LSC, 2004). Feedback from learners is not, however, considered as a consistent part of the development of national policy (Griggs et al, 2008). Learner experience is part of the quality assessment regime for all providers but is not integrated into the planning processes of local Learning and Skills Councils. Decisions made in relation to funding and targeting are made with regard to national and regional allocations and targets (LSC, 2007a) but not taking into account of specific feedback from local learners.

Many of the issues which the research raises for policy implementation at local level arise as a result of the increasing insertion of regional activity into the policy mix (LSC, 2007). Increasingly, while accepting the need for local activity, there is an emphasis on the use of larger contracting units and economies of scale in the allocation of resources meaning less autonomy in local areas (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). While national policy reiterates the need for local focus and delivery (LSC, 2006), the expansion of regional infrastructure makes this increasingly problematic. It would seem from the research, that learners are currently having a positive experience but this may be because of locally developed, locally

focussed delivery taking place through community venues with a specific knowledge of their neighbourhood (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). However, this approach will become increasingly more difficult to sustain as greater emphasis is placed on delivering through fewer but larger direct contracts. Local autonomy to determine how to allocate resources is being reduced, while at the same time local delivery and responsibility is being emphasised (Bochel et al, 2007).

Arising out of the research and the discussions above there are specific points to be made about the local implementation of policy and its' impact on individuals.

- *It is important to pay attention to an individual's views about the impact that policy has on their experience.*

While policy development aims to meet the broader goals of that particular policy, it is essential to take into account policy implementation locally and the impact that it may have on individuals (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Taking a solely professional or interest group (Hill, 2003) approach to policy development may create a mismatch between the policy intention and policy consequence (Newman, 2002). Understanding how learners might be experiencing learning activity does require actual input from the learners themselves, it cannot be entirely driven by the policymakers assumptions (Bochel et al, 2007). Not doing so, could lead policy makers to take a one-sided and little challenged view about the impact of local policies on individual experience (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) Responses from learners in this study indicated that their experience of the government's Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001) was positive. When this policy was first implemented at local level, work carried out by the local LSC and its partners was designed to make sure that the actual implementation process was able to take into account the needs of individuals, leading to a flexible and supportive range of delivery options (Barton et al, 2006). Had there not been local flexibility, this would not have been the case. The study indicated that learners have positive perceptions of local policy

implementation with regard to those aspects that directly affect them. Locally, it is vital therefore that we engage in a continuing dialogue with learners as well as professionals throughout a process of change and during the development of new policy approaches in the future. However, as local influence is reduced, this positive picture may change in the future.

- *'Personal factors seem to be significant in individual's experiences of formal learning.*

'Personal/ domestic reasons' (Kambouri and Francis, 1994) or 'personal factors (McGivney, 2001) seem to be significant in understanding the experiences of individual learners and how their attitudes to formal learning are influenced, and, indeed, may be altered over time. It is important that research is carried out in a manner which gives individuals the opportunity to describe their own experiences in their own way and that individual interpretation is taken into account (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) when looking at how policy is developed and implemented as it can affect the impact of a policy on the individual (Bochel et al, 2007). Based on the descriptions individuals have given in this study, understanding how they see their experiences of formal learning is extremely significant with regard to the local implementation of policy. It can influence not only the approach to delivery for those who are currently re-engaging (Schuller et al, 2004), but it is also crucial in helping us to understand the issues for those who are not (McGivney, 2001; Barton et al, 2006).

Once again, this is an important debate to be had with national and regional policy makers about the need to pay close attention to individual experience of participation in learning. It may be possible to use smaller scale ethnographic studies which seek to understand in greater detail the 'small impacts that learning can have in people's lives.'(Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 2001)

- Understanding the *impact* of policy on learners' experience is as vital as being able to quantify attendance and demographic

profiles, arguably more so, since, based on the responses in this study, personal factors (McGivney, 2001) would seem to be a key influence in terms of take-up and maintaining engagement in learning.

- *Some adults do return to formal learning again in spite of previous poor experiences they may have had.*

  Some individuals do return to formal learning as adults despite the bad experiences they may have had previously. The implication of this for local policy implementation would seem to be that individuals may get involved in learning again as a result of having some of their other, often more pressing, needs met (Barton et al, 2006). In some cases, particularly in a community or voluntary sector context, learning is not the primary reason why people re-engage (Barton et al, 2006). It is often the extra support such as childcare that individuals are able to access that may encourage them to take part. Attending a course which is running in a particular centre, for example, becomes part of the 'deal' in order to access the other activities or support on offer. Given the extra costs associated with these elements against the potential for incentivising re-engagement, does the end justify the means in terms of local policy implementation? Once again, further research on this is would be useful. If delivery of learning through community and voluntary sector partners is effective, what are the ways in which this activity can be supported and how does this need for local, neighbourhood delivery (Taylor and Wilson, 2006) balance against the 'bigger but fewer' contracting approach being increasingly used as part of the regionalisation of delivery (BIS, 2009)?

- *Impact of messages emphasising skills*

  This is a concern that is at the centre of the government's policy on adult skills relating to the honesty and unconditionality of the

offer that is being made to individuals (Coffield, 1999). There are concerns here for all stakeholders in terms of the broader policy rhetoric around the economic benefits of skills acquisition (BIS, 2009) and national imperatives about individuals having personal responsibility (Preece, 2001) for contributing to the national skills base. These issues extend down to local agencies and on an organisational level to providers and support organisations. What are the messages that people are hearing about where responsibility lies in terms of personal development? Increasingly, individuals are being asked to accept personal responsibility (Preece, 2001) for overcoming circumstances that, for the individuals in this study at least, are a product of a sustained failure of state systems in terms of school and provision for young people. Further centralised policy development which requires individual commitment, without taking into account the real impact of what is being expected of individuals at a local level (Bochel et al, 2007) risks widening further the gap between the intention of these policies and their impact.

What are the implications of the research for local practice?

The outcomes from the research have a direct implication for our local implementation activity. In order to make sure that, where possible, the conclusions of the study inform how we carry out our role at a local level, I have outlined some actions which will be taken as a consequence of the study.

1. Where possible what we do locally will incorporate a more in depth look at who we should be including within our planning processes, particularly focussing on including individual learners and making active attempts through neighbourhood and voluntary organisations to talk to non-learners. Over the course of the study, our local approach to implementation of policy initiatives has developed to include a more practice based approach, bringing providers, other agencies and community based organisations together to deliver an 'Adult Learning Offer' as

close as possible to local needs through 14 sub-areas based around market towns in Lincolnshire.

2. We have undertaken to work with local universities to increase our support for research into the local implications of policy changes in adult learning. During 2006, the local LSC provided funding to support a range of action-research projects focused on aspects of adult learning and will continue to fund activity during 2007/2008. The project entitled, 'Adult Learning in Lincolnshire and Rutland: voices from practice' (Atkin and O'Grady, 2007)

3. There will be an increased emphasis on support and professional development training for adult learning tutors through the further expansion of our local CPD Network. The Network was originally set up to support Skills for Life tutors but is currently being expanded to include support, resources and professional development opportunities for all tutors involved in adult learning provision.

4. We have also concentrated our community focussed activity on the development of a 'Learning Community' concept in several of our most deprived wards, and are committed to developing further sites over the coming years[9]. Central to the development of Learning Communities is working with individuals within neighbourhoods to develop provision that meets their needs and to involve other agencies and stakeholders in developing services that the community wants to access (Taylor and Wilson, 2006). Delivering this access is a fundamental part of an effective Learning Community. Taking this approach has been a direct result of this research and my reflections on what makes learning relevant to the individual.

5. However, the impact of all of these can only be said to be extremely local. At the same time as these changes have been

[9] Currently (2009), there are 14 active Learning Community sites across Lincolnshire

taking place, there has been a considerable change in terms of national policy which has resulted in an increasing focus of activity on regional funding and targets. Local delivery is still used as part of the rhetoric but the imperative is now on regional decisions, regional contracts and economies of scale (LSC, 2006). Further changes are likely to happen over the next few years and it is the nature of these that will determine whether this new local approach can be sustained. It is therefore important that more work is done in this area, particularly with respect to empowering local stakeholders to become the drivers of this activity as the role of the local LSC diminishes. It is my intention to use the outcomes of the research and the experience I have gained to increase my efforts to influence local, regional and national colleagues where possible.

Further research

Related to this are three particular areas of interest in terms of further research that I am particularly keen to undertake involving one of the groups of learners that I worked with in the study.

- To look further into the idea of 'creating dependency' on the support of the delivery organisation as a consequence of the depth and intensity of support offered to individuals. The development of a form of 'surrogacy' (possibly as a family or parent) where the individual is able to access various forms of help and advice. The quid pro quo for this is often attendance at a course or activity in the centre and to some extent conformity to the norms and values of the organization involved.

- To look in more depth at the nature of promises made and expectations created for individuals in terms of the consequences, outcomes and benefits of engaging in learning. The pivot of the government's Skills Campaign – Our future in our Hands (LSC, 2007a) is the need for everyone to take responsibility for their own, and by implication, the nation's

development by getting further skills. The benefits are framed in terms of a better life, economic empowerment and a better personal and national future. To what extent do these promises translate into positive outcomes for individuals taking up learning, what difference does it make to their lives in real terms?

- To take a broader view and look at the potential consequences of asking individuals to trade off having their needs met through a range of interventions against their compliance with societies' norms and behaviours. Field (2006) refers to individuals who are present in learning situations but who are not taking a direct part in order to access short term practical benefits associated with attendance. When this is coupled with promises about greater benefits, what is the effect on the individual when a) the support is withdrawn and b) the promised benefits don't accrue? Some of the comments made by learners in this study, seemed to indicate that individuals felt that attending their course was part of a price that had to be paid to access other support.

Personal comment

Going forward, effective progress in policy implementation that matches policy intention to policy consequences is only possible, in my view, through the involvement of individuals directly in the development of the skills policies which affect them (Bochel et al, 2007). While it is essential to involve as wide a range of stakeholders as possible in the process, it is understanding the experience of the individual, ***from the perspective*** of the individual, that is crucial. In real terms, policy makers, and those who implement those policies, do not currently in reality 'put the learner at the heart of what we do' (LSC, 2005). We make assumptions about what will work best, translate into actions policies which are often contradictory and counter-productive, placing an over reliance on results in terms of targets met or funds spent and continually move on to the next 'big'

initiative or policy drive. All of this without that fundamental consultation with those at whom, the policies are aimed.

It is my personal view that we should concern ourselves less with the overall message and exhortations about personal or national benefit (BIS, 2009) and more about how policies actually impact on the experiences of those at whom they are targeted. Individuals are for the most part able to understand the fundamental issues involved and experience for themselves the direct impact of policy. Our focus should be to identify ways in which we can work with individuals to take account of what they are able to tell us directly about the experiences they are having. We should be concentrating on developing that dialogue which Field (2006) refers to between **researchers**, policy makers and professionals involved with adult learning to enable us to work more closely with those individuals and communities on whom these policies have an impact. By listening to what they say, it is possible that we can deliver opportunities for learning throughout life which are accessible, appropriate, and challenging but most of all relevant to the experiences of those for whom they are intended and in so doing, work to reduce the gap between policy content and its local context.

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APPENDICES

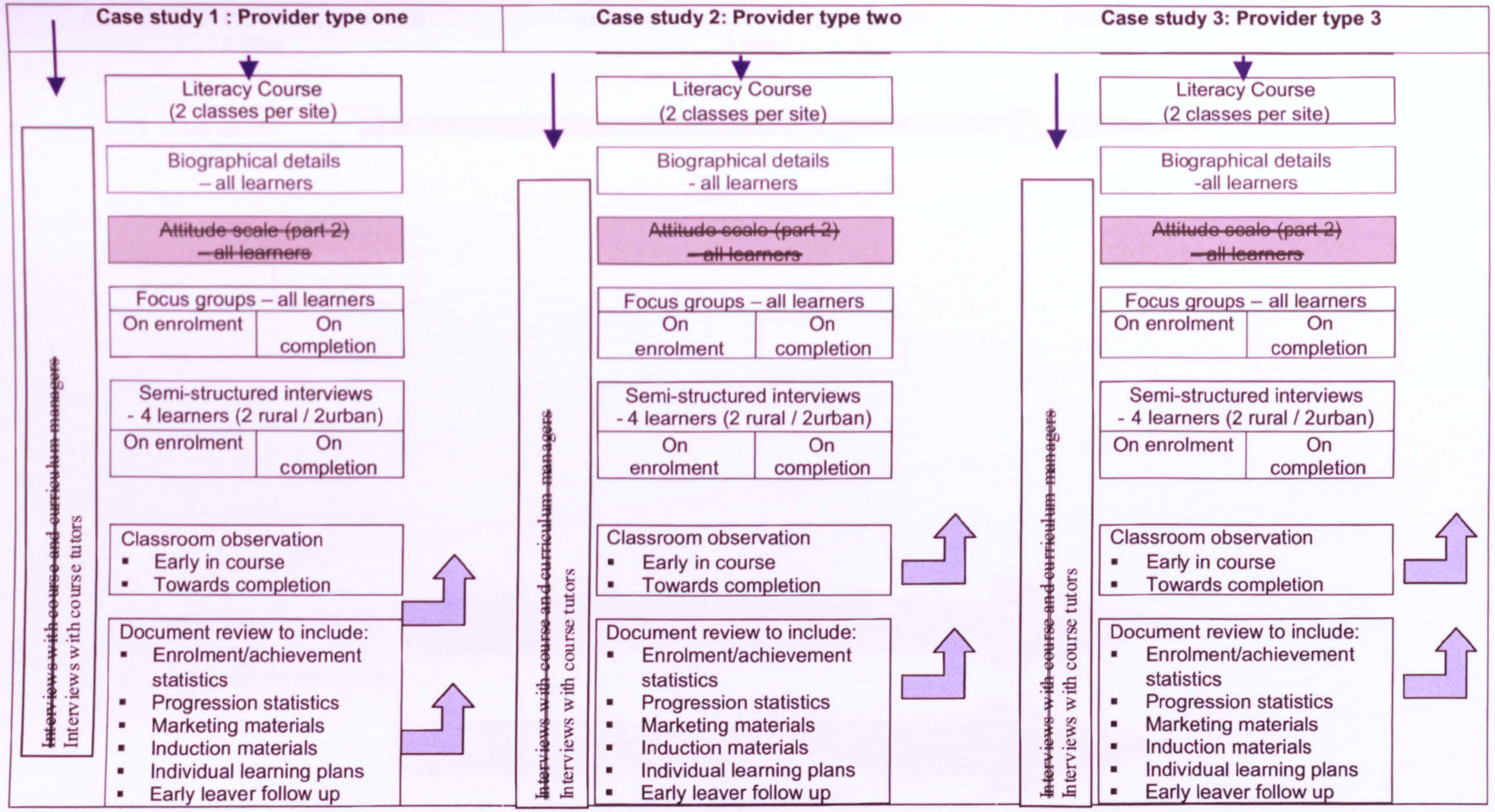
Appendix 1: Provider, venue and class details

This table summarises information on the various types of provider and gives some background on the class and venue.

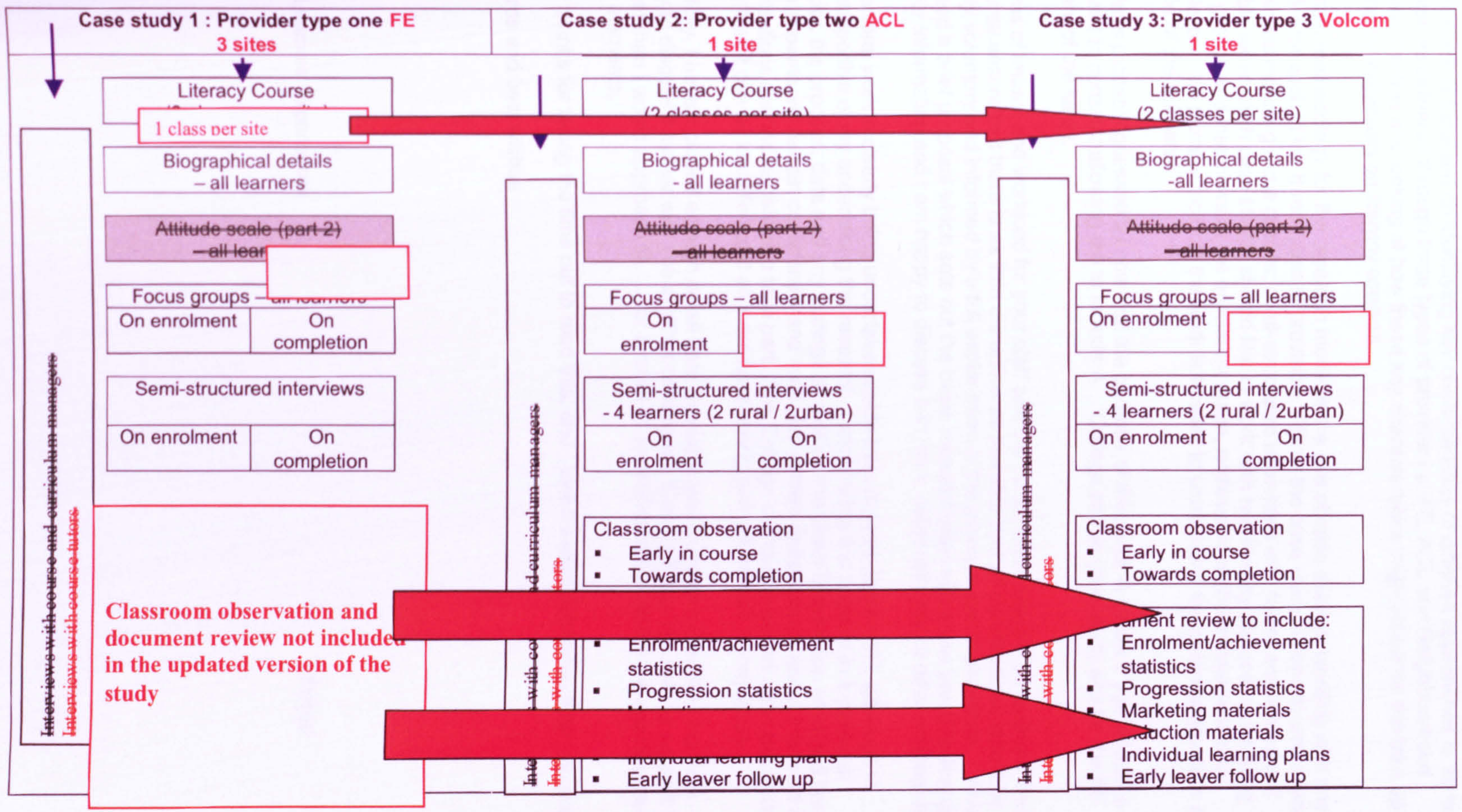
Provider	Venue	Type of class	Gender	Age	Employment status	Location
FE College 1	Based at a voluntary sector run Women's' Shelter	Mixed level literacy course run by the College but hosted by the voluntary organization as part of what is offered at the Centre. Childcare is provided at on-site crèche. 3 hour session once a week.	All female	All below 25	All unemployed, some doing voluntary work at the Centre	Small seaside town, 10 minutes walk from bus and train station
FE College 2	Based at a college venue	Mixed level literacy course run twice a week in the evenings. No childcare provision	Male and female	Between 19 and 53	Some individuals are employed, others were not.	Located at college satellite premises located in centre of market town.
FE College 2	Based at employer premises	Individual one to one sessions taking place once a week for 2 hours, at the employers premises	Male	40 – 50	Employed	Located at employer premises outside town.

ACL provider	Based at a local pub	Mixed level literacy course run by the ACL provider using the pub as a locally based venue. No childcare although children often came with their mothers and were informally looked after by the group taking turns however this was in the same room as the class so wasn't ideal.	All female	Between 27 and 51	All unemployed	Located in the heart of a council estate in a small market town
Community sector provider	Neighbourhood Access and Training Centre	Mixed level literacy class catering for a range of individuals, some with learning difficulties. The class took place twice a week for 2 hours. Childcare was available through arrangements with local Surestart sites.	Male and female	Between 32 and 63	All unemployed. One individual was doing voluntary work at the Centre	Located centrally to a deprived ward within city

Appendix 2 – Full study plan – initial version



Appendix 2a - Full study plan – modified version – changes in red



Appendix 3a – draft permission letter

Dear B.....

Please excuse my writing during what must be a very busy time for you but I would like to ask for your support with a project that I am undertaking as part of the research work for my doctorate.

The research is focussed on identifying key characteristics of different approaches to literacy provision as delivered through three types of provider i.e. FE, ACL and Neighbourhood Learning Centres and looking at how these key characteristics might influence the take up of learning by individuals on literacy courses.

The main methodology for the research model is the use of case studies, working with one provider for each of the three types of provision. Within the case study, I hope to use a range of methods including focus groups; semi-structured interviews with tutors and learners. If possible within each case study I should like to work with two literacy classes, conducting focus groups and interviews at the enrolment stage, midway through the course and on completion. The primary focus of the work is to seek to understand the personal journeys of a sample of the learners.

You have probably guessed by now that the purpose of this letter is to ask if you would be prepared to consider allowing me to include A... College as the case study site for the FE element of the study.

In terms of impact and workload for your staff and the contribution needed by learners, I will of course ensure that there is as little disruption as possible and all contributions would be entirely voluntary and informed by a full explanation of the process and implications. I have attached a brief proposal which sets out the basic research plan with some possible timings for your information and I am happy to discuss it in more detail with you or other colleagues.

My doctoral work is clearly being undertaken aside from my role at the LSC, although P..... is very supportive of my undertaking the research. I am making this request in a personal capacity, the process, data and any findings as well as the direct information collected from all participants will remain confidential and I will give written undertakings about this to all the organisations and individuals who take part.. The College will not be written up in the study in a way that it can be identified and all individuals taking part will remain anonymous.

Hopefully, I have included enough detail here to enable you to make a decision, but I am happy to discuss it further with you or other colleagues. Clearly if you feel able to support my request then I would approach M..... for a more in depth discussion about the specific case study elements.

Many thanks for taking the time out to read this, and I look forward to hearing from you soon

Regards and best wishes

Appendix 3b – Consent form example

My name is D..... and I am doing research on a project which looks at different types of English courses. Part of this work, is to talk to people who are on these courses and to ask them to tell me about the experiences of formal learning (e.g. school) they have had in the past and also about how they feel about the course they are doing now.

At the end of the project, I will be submitting the report as part of my exams for a postgraduate degree in Adult Learning.

Your tutor has already explained what I will be doing and I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Before we start, I would like to stress that:

- Your participation is completely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any of the questions
- You are free to pull out at any time.

The group and individual interviews will be kept strictly confidential and the specific information in them will only be available to me. No one else will have access to the full interviews and where parts of the interview may form part of the final report, under no circumstances will your name or anything that might identify you be included. It will be completely anonymous.

If you wish to talk to me about the work or the report, you can contact me on XXXXXXXXX.

Please would you sign this form so that I have a record that I have read the contents to you, explained what is happening and answered any questions that you had.

Thank you very much

_____ (signed)

_____ (print name)

_____ (date)

Appendix 4 - Interview schedule (questions and notes)

Name of participant	
Date of interview	
Time of interview	
Location / venue	
Course name	
Lesson number	

Section 1 - covering research question 1 – asking individuals to describe their previous experiences of learning		
Suggested questions	**Modifications/additions as a result of focus groups etc**	**Notes and observations from Interview**
Before this course you are doing now, when was the last time that you remember taking part in any formal learning?	If they mention school as last experience – ask when they left school?	
How long ago was that?		
When did you finish the course?	Or school?	
Can I ask you to tell me a bit about what it was like?	Also ask if they achieved any qualifications such as GCSEs	
Can you describe any specific things that happened	Taking care not to imply an opinion, try to get them to	

and how they made you feel?	explain in detail	
What are some of the things you liked about the course?		
Were there any things about the course you would change or do differently if you could?		
How did you get on with others?		
How did you get on with the teacher/tutor?	Also ask about family and siblings and how that affected school?	
How did your experience affect your life, do you think?	Can you explain what you mean? Can you give me an example of what you mean?	

Section 2 – covering research question 2 – asking individuals to describe their current experiences of learning		
Suggested questions	**Comments / additional questions**	**Notes and observations from interview**
How long have you been coming to this course?		
How do you usually get here?	Establish if it is difficult and why?	
Why did you choose to come to this particular course?	Any particular / obvious reasons why they chose this course over others?	
How do you feel you have settled in?	Again, need to take care not to put words into the individual's mouth	
Can you tell me something about the course, what kind of things are you doing?		

What are some of the things you like about the course?	These are the same questions as in section 1 Are you enjoying the course?	
Are there any things about the course you would change or do differently if you could?	If there are, ask them why and how?	
How do you get on with the others on the course?	Have they formed friendships outside of the course times etc	
What do you think about the course tutor?	Also ask them to compare their previous/current experiences on this.	
Do you think that the things you are learning are helping you at home; at work?	Issues such as helping children, getting promotion, but also enjoying learning – increased confidence etc Can you describe some of the things that you are doing?	
Has being on this course had an influence on your life, do you think?	Ask them to describe in more detail – tell me what has happened and why you think so?	

What are the differences between this course and the other experiences (like school) that you were telling me about earlier?	Can you give me some examples of what you mean?	
What do you think you will be doing in the future?	Where do you see yourself in 3 / 5 years time? Possibly ask about when children are at school?	

Section 3 – covering research question 3 – asking individuals their views about elements of the Skills for Life Strategy. This section covers 4 specific elements of the Strategy.		
Suggested questions	**Comments / additional questions**	**Notes and observations from interview**
1. Format of courses should be structured to reflect the needs of the individual learner.		
At the beginning of the course, did the tutor explain what would be happening?	Who did you speak to and what are some of the things they told you about?	

Did you get a chance to ask questions?		
Have you been able to suggest ideas and changes to the course, and to tell the tutor what you would like to do?	Can you give me some examples of this?	
2. Learners should have access to clear support and guidance about routes to qualifications and progression opportunities so that individuals can understand what they need to do to progress.		
What is the name of your course?	Are there other courses like this that you can do? Do you know where they are?	
Is there anyone you could speak to about what other courses you could do?		
Has your tutor asked you about what you would like to do next?	What are you planning to do when this course finishes? What sort of things do you think you would	

	like to do in the future?	
3. Learners should be supported to develop individual action plans and to establish short and long terms goals for their learning		
Do you feel you had a chance to tell your tutor about the things you wanted to learn?	What sort of things did you want to learn?	
Did you spend some time developing your own learning plan?	Have you got a copy of your plan? What are some of the goals you included?	
Do you go through your plan with the tutor and update it, make changes if necessary?	Do you think that you are achieving the goals that you set yourself?	
Can you give me an example of one of your goals?		
4. Learners should have access to a clear set of nationally recognized qualifications.		
Do you get a qualification at the end of your course?	Would you like to get the qualification? Do you know what the qualification is?	
What do you have to do to get the qualification?	How do you feel about doing the test/exam?	
How important is the qualification to you?	If already have a qualification – how did it feel to get the qualification?	

	Would you like to do more learning like this?	

Note: A pdf file showing an example of an annotated interview schedule is contained in Appendix 8

Appendix 5: Participants in the study

This table gives some non-specific biographical details about each of the participants. I have included some detail to sketch a background for each individual however, I have not included information which might identify anyone which was part of the agreement with the participants in the planning stage of the study.

Venue	Nickname	Gender	Age	In paid Work?	Other biographical details
Women's Shelter	Lily	F	20	No	Single mother with two children, she left school after her GCSEs. She has found it difficult to cope and has had mental health problems. She was referred to the Shelter by her Health Visitor and she attends the centre as many mornings in the week as she can. She has been attending the course for over a year.
	Jane	F	24	No	Recently married with four children. Didn't take her GCSEs and dropped out of school due to bullying and 'always being in trouble there'. Recently reconciled with her partner. She attends the centre everyday and is currently undergoing counseling at the centre. Also referred by the Health Visitor. Will not be able to attend the centre after the age of 25 due to issues with their funding.
	Claire	F	19	No	Single mother with one child. Once again referred by the Health Visitor, she hasn't been attending for long. Took her GCSEs but didn't pass any. She is keen to get a job when her child starts school.
Local college site	Paul	M	42	Yes	Married with 3 children. He is attending the class to improve his reading and writing as he wants to apply for a promotion within his company. He says that his wife has

					helped him to cope with 'stuff' at work so far but if he wants to get a supervisor's job he needs to be able to read and write better. He is full of praise for the tutor and the course and feels it is making a significant difference in his life.
	Moira	F	53	No	Divorced fairly recently and her children are out of the house. She would like to go back to work part-time but feels she needs to brush up her reading and writing as well as wanting to do an IT course. She didn't work while her children were growing up, but now she wants to get a job to get her ' out of the house' and to supplement her income.
	Roy	M	31	Yes	Single with no children. He wants to change jobs and move into an office type role. He wants to improve his writing in order to help with this. He is also attending a numeracy course on another night of the week at the same venue.
	Adam	M	43	Yes	Married with three children, he is being encouraged to move into a foreman's role at work and is being supported by his employer to improve his literacy. The one to one sessions that he attends at work have been specifically commissioned by his employer.
	Jim	M	50	Yes	Married with 2 children. He is also taking up one to one lessons supported by his employer. He is not wanting to go for promotion but has been encouraged by his colleague to do the course so that he can cope better with the increasing reading and writing demands of his job, particularly aspects related to Health and Safety course that he has to attend. He feels that his children are proud of him for having a go and getting better, they have previously helped him by writing his reports out and reading to him. He is glad he can now do it himself.
Local pub	Helen	F	48	No	Lone parent with six children. She left school, she thinks, at 13 because her family

					needed her to work and she is a qualified machinist. However she has not worked for the past 20 years due to ill health. She has recently moved in with a new partner. She started attending a family learning class at her youngest child's school and wanted to continue with an English course after it finished. The tutor organized the current class and they use the pub as it is near to where they live. She believes that doing well at school is very important for her children and she wants to be able to help them with their homework.
	Brenda	F	27	No	Married with three children. Her partner has recently been made redundant so she is worried about their financial future. She wants to be able to help the children with their homework and to read them stories. She thinks that she might look for a job when the children are older especially if her partner is still out of work then.
	Alice	F	39	No	Lone parent with three children. She enjoyed the family learning course at the school and wanted to carry on learning something. She says that she can now read to her children and has begun writing letters to her sisters in Australia. She would like to get a computer so that she can contact them on the internet as well.
Community Centre	Dan	M	47	No	Married with two children. Recently had to leave work due to an illness. He feels he lacks confidence but wants to be able to go back to work in a job that doesn't rely on manual work. He wants to do a computer course as well in the future.
	Chloe	F	22	No	Single with no children. She is currently on disability allowance but would like to get a job once her reading and writing have improved. She lives with her parents, and feels that she couldn't move out and cope on her own. She thinks that attending the

					class helps with her confidence.
	Sue	F	63	No	Recently widowed and her four children are all living away. She wants to get a part-time job but she thinks she needs to improve her reading and writing skills. She always wants to get out of the house and attending the class helps with that. She has begun to volunteer at the centre as well. Her experiences of school were particularly difficult and she feels that they have held her back. She would like to overcome her nervousness and do more learning but she thinks she will have to take it slowly.

Appendix 7a - Interview extract – transcribed but no comments added.

D – so do you live on the P..... estate?

De – I just live up here

D – How old were you when you left school?

De – ooh err I cant.....er I wasn't quite 15 when I left school

D – and did you do any qualifications before you left school?

De – err no

D – did you want to get any qualifications when you were at school?

De – oh yes..... but there were difficulties.....

D – ok, and what school did you go to?

De – oh there were several.....the last school I was at was A.....

D – right well thanks XXX. This course you are on now, how long have you been coming to the class?

De – oooh, this one's only.....ooh since last year.....since I've been doing this one. Probably about 10 or 11 months, something like that.

D – and is it every week? Do you come every week?

De – it's every Wednesday, yes I come every week, unless something crops up and then I can't but I haven't missed one yet. Except for what's happened at the moment.....

D – has something made it difficult for you to come?

De – well no, but S..... (the tutor) has been poorly, and then she's been away and that.....but I haven't missed anything 'cos I couldn't come.

D – and to get here, how long does it take you?

De – about five or ten minutes, walking

D – do you ever bring any of your children with you to the class?

De – sometimes I bring the little girl, she was here last time you came

D – oh yes I remember her. Could you think back and tell me how you found out about this course?

De – errrr through the family learning course at the school.....I did the family learning course first.....and it's the same tutor we've had all the way through.

De – she tells us about different courses we can do, so.....

D – so your tutor told you about the course. Can you explain what are the reasons you decided to come?

De – well, it helps me.....to spell a bit more and that,

D – do you enjoy doing the course?

De – oooh yeah, yeah, I do

D – what is it about it that you like?

De – meeting friends for one, errr doing things for yourself for once, I might be a bit, err at first I didn't really know what to do.....but I'm getting the hang of it now. I like it.

D – when you first came did you feel nervous?

De – yeah I did, I was worried about what people would think of me, and all that, but it worked out alright.

D – and were there people that you knew here?

De – yes there were and it did help. There was a few strangers but they just mingled in with us.....they didn't say anything yunno.

D – and if you think back to when you were at school what is different about these classes to those at school?

De – yeah cos you sometimes used to get picked on at school, but here you don't.

D – why do you think you were picked on at school?

De – ummm because I weren't as clever as they were, and stuff

D – and how did that make you feel?

De – .....inside.....awful.....

D – so did you enjoy school at all?

De – yes and no

D – what were the 'yes' bits?

De – err umm, the yes bits was doing PE, cooking, sewing! I liked doing the stuff with my hands. I'm good with my hands.

D – and what were the things that you didn't like?

De – oooh, errr umm.....spelling and things like that. I had problems with that.....

Appendix 7b – Extract from follow up interview – comments typed in

D – when you were at school, were you a rebel in school as well?

K – no, I was bullied as a child, bullied quite bad

D – would you like to tell me a bit about that?

K – it was just that I used to be the quiet one because yunno they reckon dilexia, dyslexia don't exist but I couldn't read properly, yunno I can write perfect but my spelling and my readings not on best form, its improved since coming here. So because I always, I never asked for help. I never asked for help on anything, no matter what it is.

D – why is that?

K – because I never got the help when I was younger, that I should have. I learned to do it myself, it got done my way.

D – so at school then you didn't ask for help either?

K – no, I just used to sit at the back, I was the quiet one, apart from when I went to army cadets.

D – so was it the other kids that bullied you, was it?

K – yeah

D – did you tell any of your teachers?

K – I tried, but it just got passed off and they didn't do anything

D – were you the only one that you know of in your class that was bullied or were there others?

K – there were a couple of others, as they called it the thick and dumb crowd but I had a good mate who was in with the in crowd as you can call it but she did a lot to help me I would say.

D – who were the bullies, were they the.....

K – the better looking, the gobby ones. Not so much the clever ones because they used to nick all my work. (pauses) cos some things I'm good at and some things I'm not so. And I used to fail my exams because I didn't have any course work.

D – when you said earlier on that you used to stop off at your partners place to miss the lessons you didn't like, were they the lessons where the bullies were?

K – I just hated school altogether because yunno, back then you had your set classes with them set people all the time.
D – right, so it was always the same in lessons?

K – yeah, but I didn't like school and going to XXX's, I mean up until I had my first child we hadn't done anything, I mean we'd held hands and kissed but he was more like a big brother or my rock as people would call it. Like a security blankey.

D – so it must have been very difficult when you split up then

K – it was very difficult, I had a breakdown.

D – why did you split up?

K – it's his mum, I'll just leave it at that (laughs) it's his mum.

D – you say that your partner has just moved back in. Did you come to the course while he was away?

K – I think I was coming for a little while before he left, then I came while he was away.

D – and how did you feel coming to the course during what was a bad time for you?

K – it gave me something else to concentrate on. I was doing something, I wasn't sitting just mulling over my problems.

D – so you didn't find it hard to come to the course during that difficult time?

K – I was glad to come to the course, it gave the kids a break from me, from my depression, I had really bad depression and my mum was taking my eldest away just to give me a break, I was pregnant and then he was born and, it was a whole ball of different things and coming here gave me that break, somewhere to leave the kids, I could sit and talk or do courses, whatever I wanted.

D – getting back to your experience of school, could you sum up what school was like for you?

K – it was a pure nightmare, a nightmare some things were good but the rest was just a nightmare. I didn't like it. I was, my mum dragged me out of school from N..... where I was one of the top girls and doing really well, my grades were good. And although life for her generally was bad, mine was fine, I'd got over the molesting and the rest of it, we'd been able to talk about it. But because life was bad for

her, then she met my second step dad and he lived up this way, so we had to move. So I went from good schooling to shit and then I just couldn't be bothered with it. It was a really bad time then, leaving my friends, it was heartbreaking leaving N.....

D – and do you think you still feel angry?

K – yeah, I do hate my mother for it, and she knows I do. But then I love her, she loves me, she did what she thought was best. But then if I hadn't moved up here I wouldn't have my boys, so.....

D – the teachers at your second school – the one here, what do you think they thought about you, did they think about you?

K – I don't know to be honest (pause) cos I never really spoke to them apart from one was a helper cos we had a boy in our school who was in a wheelchair, erm and he needed help doing his work and most of his stuff had to be done through laptops, he could talk but not very clearly, he couldn't walk he had to have a frame attached to him and he helped me a lot, the teacher that helped him and then my RE teacher was the only other good teacher I really had.

D – so the other teachers they weren't horrible to you, do you think they ignored you?

K – they just picked on me and put me on the front and stuff and that sort of thing just made everything worse.

D – can you ever remember a time when you felt embarrassed or humiliated, were you ever put in a situation when you felt like that?

K – oh yeah they have done, like errr (she says this as if it was commonplace) like in French when they would ask me to read something out or try and explain it err and I couldn't because I had always done German at my first school and I couldn't grasp the French side of it and every time I asked for help I never got it so I just used to copy my mates work.

D – cos that sort of thing stays with you doesn't it? Those feelings?

K – not drawing attention to yourself

D – and yet you are doing really well here

K – yeah, I'm happy here, I'm happy in the state of my life where I am at the minute. The kids are getting better, I'm better, I'm going to quit smoking now which will improve everything really cos of my breathing. Err I've still got problems at home but then I haven't got all my family around me anymore confusing me. So it's just me and the kids usually which is a lot easier.

D – there are a lot of differences between school and this course. Can you think of some of the really important differences for you?

K – cos this is a lot more friendlier, it's a happier environment. We've all been in the same situation or similar situations, we can all give each other different advice on the terrible twos. You get a lot of input which can help. Just general stuff, you can go out and have a laugh. It's like one of the girls who used to come here, C....., it's her birthday in a fortnight so we've now decided we're going to have an Ann Summer party.

D – so you've made lasting friendships even though people aren't here anymore you still keep in touch? Errm when you found you were pregnant at school, how did you feel?

K – errm what's really daft is that when you are at school they come round with that computerised doll.....I couldn't understand why my stomach kept getting bloated but my periods have never been regular so I never kept records and I was never any good at taking medication cos I could never remember to take it (laughs) and so it was a case of, err I just ignored it, but I was doing dope and I was drinking a lot so I thought that had something to do with it. So I was doing this computerised doll and then not long after that I found out that I was just under 3 months pregnant so it was like, I did this doll and now I'm pregnant! But you're supposed to do the doll so you don't get pregnant (laughs), not have the doll while you're pregnant. And then, cos I'd had a scare a few months back that I was because of a one night stand that I couldn't remember. So I wasn't sure and that was frightening, I was petrified, mother went off her rails and what not. But then when we found out I was pregnant she was calm. I stayed out all night because I couldn't face her but she was really calm and my step dad was fine about it after she had spoken to him, all my family was quite together which shook me.

D – so they were supportive?

K – yeah! I thought they would be a bit weird about it.

D – could you have made a different decision about having the baby?

K – I did debate about having an abortion or not, but we don't believe in abortion.

D – We? Is that your family?

K – All of us, but me as well.

Note: A pdf file showing an example of an annotated transcript is contained in Appendix 9

Appendix 8 page – replace with pdf file

Appendix 9 page – replace with pdf file

Appendix 4a

Interview questions and notes

Name of participant	Jim
Date of interview	15 Feb 2005
Time of interview	3.30pm
Location / venue	Employer premises
Course name	1:1 session
Lesson number	not known

± 18 months

Section 1 - covering research question 1 – asking individuals to describe their previous experiences of learning		
Suggested questions	**Comments / additional questions**	**Notes and observations from interview**
Before this course you are doing now, when was the last time that you remember taking part in any formal learning?	If they mention school as last experience – ask when they left school?	J is keen to take part + explain well
How long ago was that?		
When did you finish the course?	Or school?	
Can I ask you to tell me a bit about what it was like?	Also ask if they achieved any qualifications such as GCSEs	No quals 'left school early'
Can you describe any specific	Taking care not to imply an	

Again difficulty identifying time frame → other interviewees!

things that happened and how they made you feel?	opinion, try to get them to explain in detail	Quite thoughtful here – pauses
What are some of the things you liked about the course?	School only! Experience!	
Were there any things about the course you would change or do differently if you could?	✓	
How did you get on with others?	✓	
How did you get on with the teacher/tutor?	Also ask about family and siblings and how that affected school?	Compares own experience with that of kids – would it better for them?
How did your experience affect your life, do you think?	Can you explain what you mean? Can you give me an example of what you mean?	?

* ask tutor about timeframe
a background to developing courses via employer?

Appendix 7b.

Appendix 7b - Interview extract – transcribed but no comments added.

Comments added by hand!

D – so do you live on the P..... estate?

De – I just live up here

D – How old were you when you left school?

De – ooh err I cant.....er I wasn't quite 15 when I left school — seems quite confused about dates

D – and did you do any qualifications before you left school?

De – err no (seems quite 'shy' about it)

D – did you want to get any qualifications when you were at school

De – oh yes..... but there were difficulties..... Pauses paused

D – ok, and what school did you go to? (P

Pauses, thinks & laughs.

De – oh there were several.....the last school I was at was A.....

D – right well thanks [redacted]. This course you are on now, how long have you been coming to the class?

De – oooh, this one's only.....ooh since last year.....since I've been doing this one. Probably about 10 or 11 months, something like that.

D – and is it every week? Do you come every week?

De – its every Wednesday, yes I come every week, unless something crops up and then I cant but I haven't missed one yet. Except for what's happened at the moment.....

D – has something made it difficult for you to come?

De – well no, but S..... (the tutor) has been poorly, and then she's been away and that.....but I haven't missed anything 'cos I couldn't come.

D – and to get here, how long does it take you?

De – about five or ten minutes, walking

D – do you ever bring any of your children with you to the class?

De – sometimes I bring the little girl, she was here last time you came

D – oh yes I remember her. Could you think back and tell me how you found out about this course?

De – errrr through the family learning course at the school.....I did the family learning course first.....and it's the same tutor we've had all the way through.

NB Course put on by tutor as a 'progression opportunity' after FL Course.

De – she tells us about different courses we can do, so.....

D – so your tutor told you about the course. Can you explain what are the reasons you decided to come?

De – pause well, it helps me.....to spell a bit more and that, (pause) .

D – do you enjoy doing the course?

De – oooh yeah, yeah, I do – Very animated!

D – what is it about it that you like?

– pauses, responds hesitantly

De – meeting friends for one, errr doing things for yourself for once, I might be a bit, (pauses) err at first I didn't really know what to do.....but I'm getting the hang of it now. I like it. (pauses)

D – when you first came did you feel nervous?

De – yeah I did, I was worried about what people would think of me, and all that, but it worked out alright.

D – and were there people that you knew here?

De – yes there were and it did help. There was a few strangers but they just mingled in with us.....they didn't say anything yunno. (pulls a face – take this as this?)

D – and if you think back to when you were at school what is different about these classes to those at school?

(pauses)

De – yeah cos you sometimes used to get picked on at school, but here you don't.

D – why do you think you were picked on at school?

(long paiuse)

De – ummm because I weren't as clever as they were, and stuff

D – and how did that make you feel?

De – .....inside.....awful..... (she stopped talking for several moments, she had tears in her eyes.)

D – so did you enjoy school at all?

De – yes and no

D – what were the 'yes' bits?

De – err umm, the yes bits was doing PE, cooking, sewing! I liked doing the stuff with my hands. I'm good with my hands. (big smiles!)

D – and what were the things that you didn't like?

(Pauses)

De – oooh, errr umm.....spelling and things like that. I had problems with that.....